

PARTICIPATING IN A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY OF
CHARACTER AND PURPOSE

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ABSTRACT

How can I, as an elementary school teacher, empower grade 4/5 students to participate in a classroom community through meaning and purpose? The role of the elementary school is profound in its influence on student social, emotional, and academic success. This qualitative study examined the factors that contribute to a successful implementation of a character-based classroom predicated on purposeful learning. A specific area of focus was the impact elementary school teachers have on developing character values and courage within a classroom community.

Through respect for confidentiality and human dignity, this project achieved its goal of ensuring that the classroom community honoured, accepted, and empowered each student. Based on three broad themes, the study derived six conclusions on how to empower students to become moral citizens and excellent leaders. Suggestions for character development at a school-wide level were also addressed.

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CHAPTER ONE.

FOCUS AND FRAMING

Introduction

Today's society struggles with the fundamental changes in family structure, community and religious affiliations. This structural shift has pushed many people to become more self focused and self-involved. With the interplay of multiculturalism, advanced technology, transportation and communication, our communities are shrinking and we are left to strive alone. As an elementary school teacher working in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, I am faced with daily challenges of diverse expectations as I try to meet the individual learning needs of the student, the cultural needs of the family, and the social needs of the school and community. My experience in a French Immersion classroom that is ethnically heterogeneous, with many first generation Canadians, and with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, has taught me to become more aware of the need to work together as a cohesive team in the classroom, school, and community. There is an urgent need to concentrate on social responsibility through fostering and empowering students to become moral citizens and excellent leaders. Such an opportunity lies in the hands of an elementary school teacher and the classroom.

In order to create a more sustainable community for our future, we, as a society, need to create a fundamental shift in our thinking. As the British Columbia Ministry of Education's expectations increase, class sizes increase and support staff diminishes the school as a whole struggles to maintain and foster social responsibility leaving heightened challenges for the teacher. Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger (2004)

describe this opportunity in *Me to We*: “When we have the courage to question and move beyond what we know, we open ourselves up to new meaningful possibilities” (p. 9).

Research Question

How can I, as an elementary level teacher, empower grade 4/5 students to participate in a classroom community of character through meaning and purpose?

Sub Questions

1. How can teachers empower students to recognize character and values directly and indirectly through the curriculum?
2. How can grades 4/5 teachers consciously promote a caring community within the classroom?
3. How can qualities of students who display, model and encourage purpose within the classroom community be defined?
4. How can successful strategies teachers use to foster character development at a grade 4/5 level be identified and how can the results be measured?
5. What support do teachers need to foster positive attributes to character and purpose within a caring community classroom?

The Opportunity

As a teacher, I find it energizing and fascinating when students leave my classroom at the end of the year transformed- with a new and improved perspective to learning. When they feel enthusiastic to learn, I feel energized, as this is the greatest gift in teaching. Generally elementary teachers witness many students of various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds come to school with different social and academic expectations. Some families advocate entirely for academics and promote methods and

opportunities for excellent grades, while other families strive for social achievement by assisting and modelling emotional growth and social awareness. When these learning avenues foster and support social responsibility in the classroom, the students grow, develop and advance their social and emotional awareness, and personal self-esteem. “A child’s sense of self-worth depends substantially on his or her ability to achieve in school” (Goleman, 1997, p. 274).

Dixon Elementary School is a mid-sized dual-track English and French Immersion School with a total population of 344 students. A majority of the students are bilingual (speaking English and French) and many of the students are trilingual (speaking English, French and their mother language). With this diverse school community, it is a challenge to equally engage every family into this community and implement congruent social responsibility. British Columbia’s Policy Order’s Mission states that schools in the province assist in the development of citizens who are:

thoughtful, able to learn and to think critically and who can learn to communicate information from a broad knowledge base; creative, flexible and self-motivated and who have a positive self image; skilled, who can contribute to society generally, including the world of work; productive, who gain satisfaction through achievement and who strive for physical well being; cooperative, principled and respectful of others regardless of differences; aware of the rights and prepared to exercise the responsibilities of an individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2004)

Further, The Dixon Elementary Code of Conduct states, “I have the right to learn and grow; I have the right to hear and to be heard; I have the right to be safe; and I will respect school rules” (2005).

As both of these documents ensure rights and respect for students within the classroom, school and community, displaying and modelling these behaviours is the most common struggle in daily learning. In a school environment, codes of conducts and mission statements are also part of the learning process to be a socially responsible citizen – teaching these students is an essential part of their education. Few institutions take their mission statements seriously enough to share them widely throughout the community (Chickering & Stamm, 2002). Given that the Ministry publishes a mission statement and encourages districts and schools to develop their own, speaks to the value the education system places on developing vision, accountability, and citizenship province wide.

Society needs congruency and consistency in order to facilitate these ideas and foster development in growth of students and their community. With this congruency, students, teachers, parents and the community feel part of a team working together in a partnership contributing to a positive society. This research opportunity focuses on developing character values, empathetic reasoning, community and courage in order to provide leadership, social and academic success at the grade 4/5 level. As an elementary teacher, I have the opportunity to shape the lives of my students, by empowering them to develop and implement moral reasoning and quality citizenship.

Significance of the Opportunity

Intermediate students who model moral leadership play important roles as leaders and role models in the school. Students at the grade 4/5 level (ages 8 to 11) have the occasion to develop these qualities and model leadership to the younger students in the

school community. Each week, these grade 4/5 students have the opportunity to strengthen their relationship with their “primary buddy class” (grade 1 students, ages 6 and 7). Together they spend time in the classroom developing language art skills and on the playground playing cooperatively. The older children challenge their thinking through the use of *scaffolding* (Vygotsky, 1962) to the younger children. Vygotsky claims that “what the child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow” (Russel, 2002). Developing these skills at an early age allows for further years of leadership (grades 5 through 7) and modelling for younger children in the elementary school.

As children learn various strategies to deal with social behaviour, relationships are strengthened and communication becomes more respectful of individual differences (Russell, 2002). Children become eager to discuss, question, reflect on and explore other viewpoints. The hope is that these examples of social development are further instilled into the community.

As a teacher, there are many benefits to concentrating on social responsibility in the classroom setting. As teachers learn to create and utilize daily classroom strategies that foster reflective thinking, understanding, tolerance and respect for others throughout the curriculum, positive effects in the school and community environment evolve. My role as a classroom teacher is to strengthen the relationships with my students and display a language that can be used in the classroom and the community.

In a society where loneliness, suicide and depression are at record levels, it is crucial that more effort on social responsibility be put into our education system

(Kielburger & Kielburger, 2004. p. 35). Without the acknowledgement of social awareness, we will continue to work against a self-exposed society filled with student competition, student gangs and violence. Daniel Goleman notes in *Emotional Intelligence*, “We are depriving our children of their competence and moral character” (1997, p. 234). Our children are our future. Our future lies in the hands of their choices and their present well being. Together “we” can make a difference.

Systems Analysis of the Opportunity

The social development of elementary school children is a fundamental intention for educators and continues to be a priority in the British Columbia educational system. With exposure to violence in video games, films, and current warfare weapon destruction the idea of empowering and fostering socially responsible students in today’s society is becoming more of a challenge. Each week, the media reminds the community of various degrees of bullying and racism that take place in British Columbia Schools. Students, parents, and teachers continue to work together to move beyond this fear.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has recently appointed a Safe Schools Task Force (2003) to consult with parents, students and educators across the province to identify ways to address violence and fear in schools. The Safe School Task Force further completed a report, *Facing Our Fears/Accepting Responsibility* (2003) to provide recommendations for improving school safety. The guide provides provincial standards for codes of conduct, and identifies attributes of safe, caring and orderly schools. This guide has been implemented to assist school boards and schools as they

strive for a safe environment, sense of belonging and connectedness for everyone in the school community.

In the spring of 1999, Richmond School District superintendent at the time- Chris Kelly and assistant superintendent at the time- Bruce Beirstro implemented a guiding philosophy entitled, “Foundations” pertaining to the district’s educational offerings on teaching methods, curriculum presentation and defined parent roles (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2000). Foundations identified a commitment to clarity, consistency and communication in the partnership between parents, teachers and students. As these “Three C’s” are reflected as the key ingredients in a child’s education, a fourth “C”, caring is fundamental to all (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2000).

In the spring of 2002, the school board passed a new framework titled *Directions* (see Figure 1) intended to provide a unifying framework for all district staff and school communities (Richmond School District, 2005d). The purpose of this framework is to build a better decision making that affect all levels in the classroom, school and district.

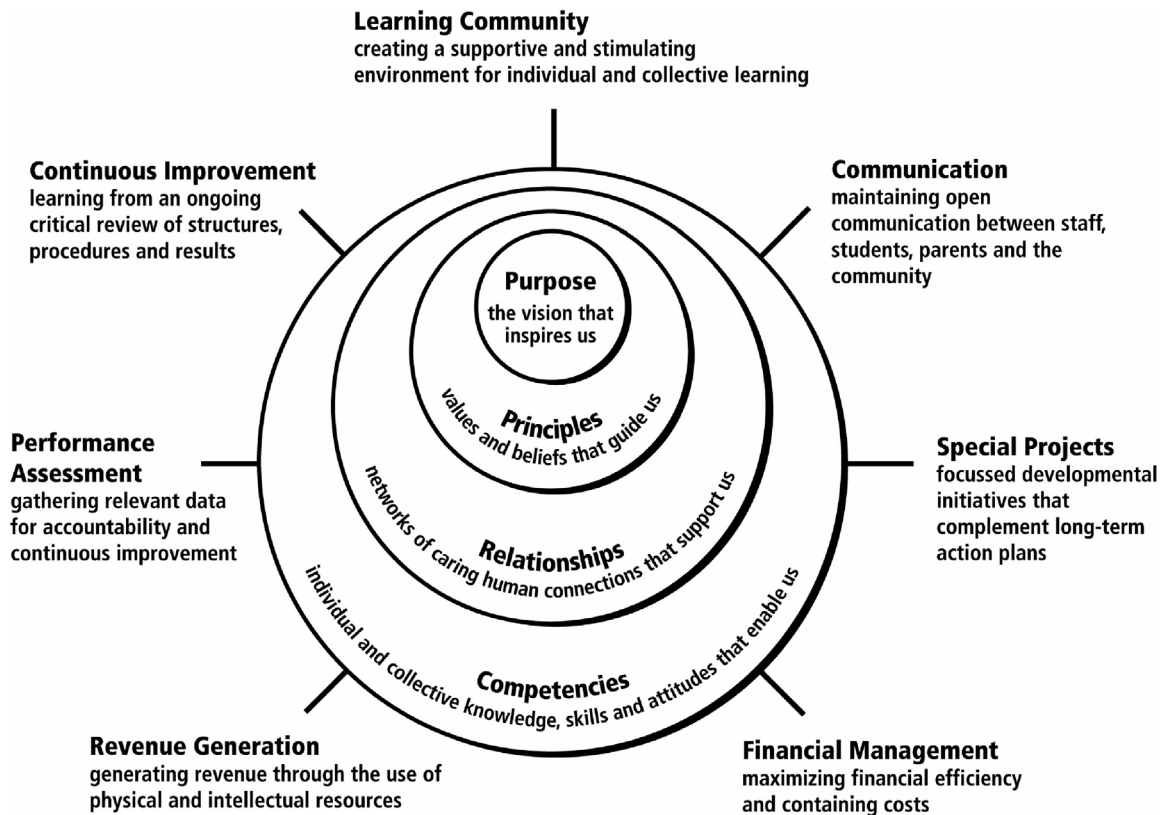


Figure 1. Directions (copyright permission granted Richmond School District #38).

In the centre of *Directions* there are four primary goals that serve the fundamental purpose to enable all learners: to uphold the principles of collaboration and inclusion, build networks of caring human relationships to support work and constantly improve the individual and collective competencies required to be successful. To ensure a balanced approach to this work, seven key areas of activity that are important in the classroom, school and district level are highlighted.

Complementing and remaining integral to the pretext of *Foundations* and *Directions*, the district developed *The District Accountability Contract* (2005a, see Figure 2) to promote a common purpose and focus among the school district and community.

Here the nuclear *Foundations* remind us of the central focus on student learning and the diverse and interdependent roles in achieving the mission of the public school system and the Richmond School District (Richmond School District, 2005).

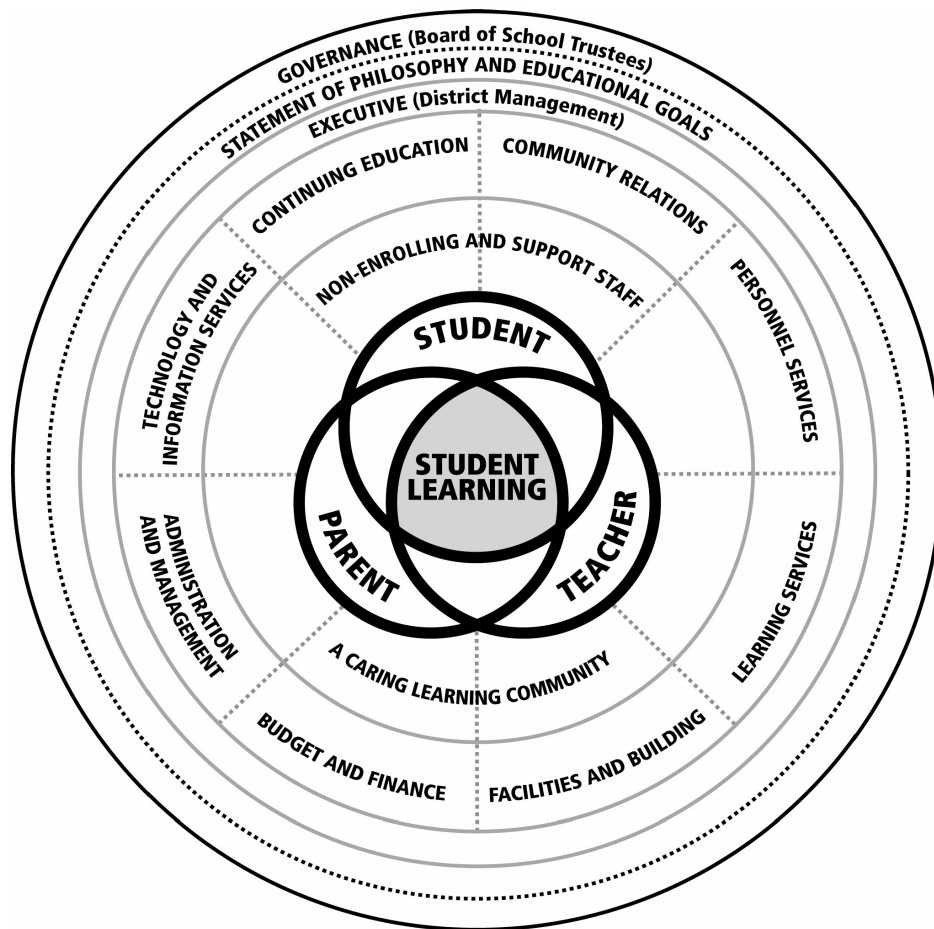


Figure 2. District Accountability Contract (copyright permission granted Richmond School District #38) .

More than anything else, the sense of caring and efforts of positive communication between the school district, school and community unite students, teachers and parents working together to support a positive learning environment. The

students are our future; the school classroom is a crucial environment to adapt essential values and foster a shared responsibility. The classroom is the beginning of student leadership opportunities.

Organizational Context

Richmond School District No.38 educates 24,500 students in 50 schools (ten secondary schools, Grades 8 through 12) and employs a teaching force of 1,400 with a support staff of 900 (Richmond School District Facts, 2005b). Approximately 45 percent of the student population speaks English as a second language (Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 2000). Dixon Elementary is one of six French Immersion schools in the Richmond School District. As a dual track school (both English and French instruction) there are more students enrolled in the French Immersion program. During the 2005-2006 academic year, 152 students are enrolled in the English program and 192 are enrolled in the French Immersion program (Richmond School District, 2005c). Over the course of the last five years, district school enrolment has declined. Within this decline, ESL enrolment continues to decline, while French Immersion enrolment continues to increase. Richmond School District has closed five schools within the last three years (Richmond School District Facts, 2005b).

The organizational conduct of Dixon School is conducive to developing a community of social and respectful learners. The Dixon Student Handbook (2004) clearly identifies the school's Mission. "At Dixon, we are a community of learners who respect and care for one another, value social responsibility, and share a love of life-long learning. Together, we support each other in our quest for personal excellence and value

the richness brought to our community through cultural and individual diversity”.

Dixon’s school motto reflects these beliefs as both adults and students share a common goal of life-long learning. At Dixon, students and staff are working together, learning together and growing together. The staff’s area of focus each year continues to touch areas of social responsibility through the Language Arts Program in order to enhance the citizenship skills of all students.

Dixon Elementary contains a positive, academic and social spirit that is threaded together through a safe school culture in the school and community. In the spirit of the school community, school wide activities integrating all classes, grades levels and programs, take place three times a year to cultivate a sense of belonging. Intermediate children demonstrate a sense of community and pride in working with primary children while fostering a sense of growth and leadership. A student leadership council representing student leaders from each class division meets each month to formally organize spirit days, activities and social fundraising in the school community. In addition, the Dixon community is involved each year in local, provincial and international charities while developing a sense of understanding in giving and sharing to those who are less fortunate.

The dynamic, positive school culture is known throughout the community. Every third Friday, the school begins the day with a school-wide assembly with an extended invitation to parents, extended family members, organizations, and is generally open to the public. Individual students and classes have the opportunity to formally share and present their learning to the school and community audience. Acts of kindness,

community services and individual leadership are acknowledged. Grade 7 student leaders organize and lead the assembly.

Once a year, the school opens its doors to the community. During the provincial Education Week students and parents take part in an assortment of classroom displays, activities, and formal events throughout the evening. This occasion allows parents and members of the community to discover the learning that takes place not only in their child's grade level, but also throughout the entire school.

The Parent's Advisory Council (PAC) and the District Parent's Advisory Council (DPAC) give parents the opportunity to be proactive and participate in education at both the school and district level. Once a month, the PAC provides a forum for consultation between the school and parents. The forum is open to all parents/guardians of students attending the school and encourages active participation to develop positive community relations (Richmond School District, 2003). At a district level, the purpose of the DPAC is to provide awareness, understanding and support for the public education system; to be an effective advocate for parents, children and youth; and to support individual school Parent Advisory Councils (Richmond School District, 2002).

Parents also play a significant role in interpreting student achievement data and setting and supporting goals for improving student achievement by being a part of the School Planning Council (SPC). The SPC's major responsibility is to involve the school community in developing, monitoring and reviewing school plans for improving student achievement. In addition, the School Board must consult with the SPC regarding allocation of staff and resources at the school, the Board's Accountability Contract and

educational services and programs in the school. The SPC is viewed as an extensive, long-term wide ranging plan supporting continuous improvement and performance assessment for the Richmond School District (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001).

Each year, the Ministry of Education administers Student Satisfaction Surveys for parents of grade 4 and grade 7 students. The surveys provide an essential source of data for the schools and reinforce School Planning Councils in the development and assessment of School Improvement Plans (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005a).

Dixon Elementary prides itself on the merits of connectedness to the community. The committees, surveys and annual monthly spirit events are intended to build social awareness and produce an organization with a conscience. Clearly the school hours and learning must extend beyond the regular school hours.

CHAPTER TWO.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF MAJOR CONCEPTS

Students must exhibit a desire to come to school and a willingness to learn in order to obtain social and academic success. These three literature reviews will explore the significant influence of creating a character valued classroom, a passionate and caring learning community and orchestrating opportunities of courage and soul within the classroom. The literature will additionally identify methods and strategies used by educators in order to consciously implement these ideas in the learning curriculum.

A Character Valued Classroom

Character education is not something on your plate. It is the plate.

Walko, J. (Lickona, 2004, p. 174)

Introduction

The concepts of moral values, virtues and character education have been re-evaluated over time. Values that were once ingrained in our belief system through the church and family are presently modified and spread throughout the home, school and community. Being able to know what is right and what is wrong, good or bad, while intrinsically understanding why, is a challenge facing all facets of society. Scholars continue to engage in growth and evaluation of their many different views of morality and values. Among these different beliefs, the value and character in youth remains paramount. Education plays a significant role in the implementation of morality among youth. This literature review will explore ideas from authors such as Thomas Lickona, Marvin Berkowitz, Nel Noddings and Marshall Rosenberg who contribute to the importance of character valued classroom. Being able to understand the importance of

teaching and modelling character development to youth is essential in order to create positive leaders and citizens in our society: “If character efforts become widespread enough, it will make a difference for our whole country and perhaps, to the extent that we become better people, for the rest of the world” (Lickona, 2004, p. 30).

Berkowitz (1998) describes how terminology is shifting worldwide. What was once termed “moral education” in the United States is now redefined as “character education.” In Scotland, “moral education” is known as “cultural education”. Moreover, he argues that morality consists of personality, behaviour and cognition. Lickona (1991) adds a subordinate category of morality: to be a moral person one must know the good, desire the good, and do the good (as cited in Berkowitz, 1998).

Understanding the virtues of a society, individually and holistically, facilitates the development and growth of character. Virtues are described as the categorical aspect of a shared goodness (Benson, 1996). Virtues assist in a specific application of an individual person in terms of that person’s nature. Various writers of the classical period have composed numerous lists of virtues. Aristotle divided all the virtues into those that were moral, having to do with character, and those that were intellectual, having to do with the mind (Benson, 1996). Thomas Aquinas, a Christian thinker, grouped four key virtues together as the cardinal, or more essential virtues: justice, wisdom (prudence), courage (fortitude) and moderation (temperance for self control). He refers to the term cardinal, from the Latin *cardo* (on the hinge) because all the other virtues circle on these four (Benson, 1996).

Pivoting from the four cardinal virtues are six essential virtues fostering the development of strong, moral character. Love, positive attitude, hard work, integrity, gratitude, and humility remain essential in the growth of a distinct character (Lickona, 2004, p. 7-10). Educator James Coughlin points out that all virtues are linked; working seriously on one virtue will likely pull all other virtues up, just as a serious weakness in one of the virtues can pull the others down (Lickona, 2004, p. 11).

Examples of such virtues make up the content of good character. Dr. Lickona suggests that virtues are affirmed by societies and religions from around the world and have a claim on our conscience. He further implies that the content of our character defines what it means to be human, promotes happiness and well-being of the individual person while enabling us to live and work in the community by serving a common good (Lickona, 2004, p. 7). While virtues continue to play a significant role in the growth and development of moral character, it is less likely to derive from a single, isolated context. Instead, various domains of society, such as the home, school, and community, carry the responsibility of this learning. What Aristotle taught ages ago contains depth and meaning for today's society: "A fulfilling life is a life of virtue" (Lickona, 2004, p. 7).

Character Development

Character education exists within the context of cultural beliefs and values. Together these create the essential virtues of a moral person. The word *character* derives from the Greek "to mark" suggesting a focus on observable conduct, or the way one tends to act-one is able to act in ways that portray good character or bad character. Thomas Lickona (1993) defines character education as:

the deliberate, proactive effort to develop good character in kids-or, more simply, to teach children right from wrong. It assumes that right and wrong do exist, that there are objective moral standards that transcend individual choice-standards like respect, responsibility, honesty, and fairness-that we should teach these directly to young people. (Neill, 2004)

His definition resembles the definition of Aristotelian virtues where the notion of character is also closely tied to behaviour. Aristotle believed that virtue originated from habitual behaviour, which eventually lead to moral behaviour. The National Association of School Psychologists (2003) concludes that students who display good character possess aspects of moral knowing, feeling and action. Further, Lickona (2004) identifies the importance of building bonds that model character. He examines seven essential methods that are appropriate to the classroom:

1. Teach as if relationship matters,
 2. Use the power of a handshake,
 3. Get to know your students as individuals,
 4. Use bonding to improve behaviour,
 5. Use the power of example,
 6. Use a self-inventory to focus on modelling,
 7. Invite guests who are positive role models.
- (pp. 114-119)

Carr (1991) argues that the modelled behaviour of adults in schools is the single most effective influence on the development of the moral character in students. Because young children learn more from what is done rather than what is said, it is crucial that adults in schools practice what they preach (Berkowitz, 1998): “A child is the only known substance in which responsible adults can be made. To optimally educate children to be responsible adults, we need to understand more fully what it takes to be a

responsible adult” (Lickona, 1991, as cited in Berkowitz, 1998). “If we want students to be respectful, we must model respect. We cannot teach where we do not go” (Barbara Luther, 2002 as cited in Lickona, 2004, p. 111).

Curriculum Implementation

“Schools have had three core tasks; to prepare young people for the world of work; to prepare them to use their minds well, to think deeply; and to prepare them to be thoughtful citizens and decent human beings” (Sizer, N.T. as cited in Lickona, 2004, p. 121). A character-valued curriculum cannot be taught in isolation. Teachers have an opportunity to model respectful moral character to students through the curriculum while teaching. As the curriculum is focused predominantly on reading and writing, teachers need to stop and refocus on helping students think of the most fundamental human questions: *How can I live my life? What goals are worth pursuing? What qualities in human beings are admirable and worth emulating? What brings about human fulfilment and what does not?* (Davidson, Lickona and Khmelkov 2004). Further, as moral models for young students, it has been addressed that teachers model the ethical person with a high level of respect and responsibility both inside and outside of the classroom (Davidson, Lickona and Khmelkov 2004). Nel Noddings (1992) adds, “Moral life so defined should be frankly embraced as the main goal of education. Such an aim does not work against intellectual development or academic achievement. On the contrary, it supplies a firm foundation for both” (p. 173).

Research indicates that teachers need to work from a holistic perspective in order to weave awareness and virtue into all aspects of the curriculum. When children

understand how virtues play into all subjects and learning processes, they begin to comprehend the reciprocal relationships that surround them (Jacobs, 2003). Lickona (1991) notes that empowerment promotes the development of respect in children by first treating them with respect (Berkowitz, 1998). “The school’s most powerful moral influence is the way we treat each other” (Berkowitz as cited by Lickona, 2004, p. 174).

Dr. Berkowitz also acknowledges that there is a need to differentiate between informal and formal curriculum and indicates that informal curriculum is the more influential. While formal curriculum is taught in systematic way within the school, informal curriculum is generated from life into the school. Often effective moral education becomes hidden in the curriculum and is an implicit asset of the informal curriculum. The key to effective moral education, therefore, is uncovering and reflecting on the hidden curriculum so it no longer remains hidden (Berkowitz, 1998). Dr. Berkowitz further concentrates on four related aspects that influence the informal curriculum: the explicit school ideology, the behaviour of adults, the governance structure, and peer norms.

It is critical that students learn that they are always in a position of choice. The choices students are making affect the habits they form and the people they become. More importantly, when young people see and understand their power and position in making choices, they are more likely to take responsibility for their actions. Once the choice is made, the responsibility is owned. Students choose how they treat people: if they will build people up or bring them down. They have the power in choosing how they will learn: if they will passively get through school or if they will develop strong work

habits for success. Intellectual and moral development can be demonstrated through various simultaneous acts and efforts in the classroom. Dr. Lickona (2004) believes that teachers can contribute exercises consciously in the classroom in a number of ways. Consistent applications that teachers can implement on a daily basis include identifying the virtues needed to be a good student, teaching that purpose, excellence and integrity are important, and teaching students to take responsibility for their learning (pp. 124-128). When students observe the devoted character of their adult teacher, they are more able to demonstrate moral ethical behaviour and choices.

The language used in dialogue between teachers and students plays a significant role in the growth and character development in the classroom. As students often feel many demands from adults and authority, it is important that their dialogue with adults is approached with clarity, empathy and connection. Dr. Rosenberg (2003) introduces the language of Non-Violent Communication, which focuses on separating observations from evaluations. He describes observations as something descriptive in which we can see, hear, or touch, while evaluations involve making inferences about the things we observe (p. 18). By differentiating the two, teachers are able to focus more of the observation while relating it to their values. Table 1 is an example of separating observation or evaluation in Rosenberg's "Non-Violent Communication".

Table 1

Observation vs. Evaluation

Examples of Mixing Observation with Evaluation	Examples of Separating Observations from Evaluations
Doug procrastinates	Doug only studies for exams the night before
Hank Smith is a poor soccer player	Hank Smith has not scored a goal in 20 games

Note. Adapted from Rosenburg, 2003, p. 18-19.

Cohen (1989) describes in that nature is the best teacher when indirectly influencing virtues into the curriculum. Many children gain a passion for justice, beauty, and cooperation when they discover (often at an intuitive level) the interconnectedness of all life - the spiritual power that exists in landscapes, rivers, and wildlife (Jacobs, 2003). Lickona adds that teachers in the elementary classroom, who regularly schedule “appreciation time” for students to reflect and publicly acknowledge how their peers have helped them, generate in students the habit of acknowledging others. This habit is assumed to potentially develop into the moral character trait of respect for others (Berkowitz, 1998). Additionally, Jacobs (2003) explains that for virtues such as courage, generosity or humility to positively guide behaviour, a variety of activities such as story telling, class discussion and role-playing are important in the classroom setting. The role of the teacher is to facilitate an active consideration for one’s co- discussants (Berkowitz, 1998).

Conclusion

Being able to distinguish what is right from wrong, and knowing why, is the basis for the development of moral and ethical values. By focusing on character education and concentrating on the ten essential virtues: wisdom, justice, courage, moderation, love, positive attitude, hard work, integrity, gratitude and humility, educators have been able to better understand the necessity and importance of the development of good citizenship in our students. As adults continue to be the most significant role model for this development, teachers play an essential role in the facilitation of moral virtues and character values in the classroom. The key is to implement these values and virtues through modelling the hidden aspects of the informal curriculum. With a heightened awareness and a nexus of community resources, teachers have the opportunity and the power to create a greater understanding of the world. “You must be the change in the world you want to see” (Gandhi as cited by Lickona, 2004, p. 118).

Creating Compassionate Caring Communities

For the young to become moral, they must be involved in the presence of people who take morality seriously.

Mary Warnock (Lickona, 2004, p. 261)

Introduction

Since World War II, society has experienced excessive social changes. Changes in work patterns, residential stability, family arrangements, language, and entertainment have left communities and people striving to familiarize and adjust to new expectations and ways of life. The strong sense of community that society once relied upon has been reshaped many times. Because of these social changes, many people lack a sense of

continuity in their lives, and feel that no one cares about them. Schools are now the necessary agent to create a caring, sustainable community to fulfill children's thirst for a strong foundation and a sense of belonging. This literature review will explore ideas from authors such as Nel Noddings, Daniel Goleman, The Dalai Lama, Racheal Kessler, Thomas Lickona, and Marshall Rosenberg who promote the importance of a caring and compassionate community within a learning environment. When students feel a sense of community, they are better able to act with empathy and motivation, thereby augmenting their academic skills and social self-esteem.

In today's schools, the presence of a caring community classroom is essential to meet society's needs and adapt to its changes. Research has explored that the role of a school can no longer concentrate only on students' academic goals any more than a family can restrict its responsibilities to feed and house its children (Noddings, 1992, p. 63). However, social preparation for the working world, parenting, and community caring fail to be a priority of many schools. The main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competence, caring, loving, and loveable people. Educators in today's schools are in a position to ask themselves what do they really want for their students? What do they need from education and what can they contribute to society?

The Importance of Community

Nel Noddings, a professor of Education at Stanford University, defines community as a group of people who are socially interdependent and participate together in discussion and decision-making (Noddings, 2002, p. 64). As a strong community works towards a shared practice of common goals, it produces capable citizens.

Noddings (2002) describes a central task for a strong, dedicated community as the promotion of moral education (Noddings, 2002, p. 64). She further states that a strong community defines and exhibits what is meant by the good life; it produces exemplars whose virtues should be emulated (p. 61). For these reasons schools represent an important public responsibility to establish a strong, caring community in order to raise healthy, competent, and happy children.

Attitudinal and character outcomes are a positive result of an established caring community. Dr. Lickona (2004) emphasizes that students who have an opportunity to feel a part of a caring community display a greater liking for school, greater empathy toward other's feelings, a stronger motivation to be kind and helpful, a higher academic self-esteem, and stronger feelings of social competence (p. 177). Furthermore, with this positive sense of belonging, students display fewer feelings of loneliness in school and will be less likely to engage in delinquent acts such as the use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana during their teenage years (Lickona, 1992, p. 179).

One of life's greatest needs is to have a sense of belonging and stability within a community. Everyone desires to be cared for through acts of compassion and affection at any stage of his or her life, as well as to maintain at least minimal level of respect and dignity (Noddings, 2002, p. 148). As human beings, compassion and affection are essential in order to develop, sustain and ensure our survival (The Dalai Lama & Goleman, 1992, p. 3).

Learning to care and be cared for are important developmental tasks requiring consciously planned opportunities. There continues to be people in society -who are

highly successful in many ways- yet have never had the opportunity to learn how to create and display acts of caring. Today, many young people not only fail to develop the capacity to care, but also seem not to know what it means to be cared for. It seems obvious that for most people being cared for themselves is a pre-requisite to caring for others (Noddings, 2002, p. 25).

Ethical caring requires reflection and self-understanding. Adults play a major role in modeling this to our younger generation as ethical caring is aimed at establishing, enhancing, and restoring a positive relation in which we respond freely because we have the desire (Noddings, 2002, p. 14). Our future depends on the younger generation; in order to value the relations of care, adults are responsible to care for our children while equally providing them opportunities to give and receive care. To develop a generation of healthy human beings, it is important to offer them a compassionate environment when they are small (The Dalai Lama & Goleman, 1992, p. 3).

Adolescents show interest in some of the most imperative questions, yet schools neglect to acknowledge their importance: “Who am I? What kind of person will I be? Who will love me? How do others see me?” (Noddings, 2002, p. 20). It is evident that if our society places more emphasis on effectively caring for children, the widespread violence and alienation of life predominant in North America would greatly be reduced (Noddings, 2002, p. 25). Compassion and affection are imperative as the official learning outcomes in public education.

One of the primary goals in today’s schools should be to consider the necessity of care. In order to have the capacity to care for others, children need to learn how to be

cared for. Teachers, moreover, play an essential role in this development. For example, teachers can assist students to reciprocate care. Those who have not been reciprocated of care are at risk not only academically but also socially. Students will lack social developmental growth while missing out on the opportunity to learn from each other. Noddings (1992) suggests that teachers cannot be expected to teach their students how to care; rather, they need to concentrate on responding with growing sensitivity in attempts to promote their students' growth (p. 108).

More opportunities and routines need to be created to promote opportunities to care. Few of us develop the skills to care for animals, plants, and people without direct, hands-on practice. Schools and classrooms need to emphasize more dialogue and activity focusing on the "needs" of objects of care. Simple acts such as keeping the school grounds clean or throwing away trash enable children to exercise the genuine act of mindful caring. When we multiply acts such as these by billions, we create a significant impact (The Dalai Lama & Goleman, 1992, p. 124).

Admiring the results of our conscious efforts promotes the responsibility of care. As we consciously and collectively take part in caring for the environment, we develop a greater appreciation for those who share the task with us. Students must practice in the company of experienced caregivers in order to comprehend the essence of learning to care (Noddings, 1992, p. 145). How we treat people and our environment has an impact on both human and non-human life (Noddings, 1992, p. 139).

A further question is how is one able to display acts of caring and compassion within communities? By acting through compassion, motivation, dialogue, experience,

and continuity, adults can have a significant influence on the younger generation. In an interview with Daniel Goleman, The Dalai Lama explained that being compassionate is simply not enough; one must act. He further explains that to be engaged and involved, one must be motivated to act with compassion. If one can proceed in service with the purest of motivation, despite the outcome, one has succeeded without regret (The Dalai Lama & Goleman, 1992, p. 96).

Curriculum Implementation

Noddings (1992) continues to discuss the significance of practice and explains how attitudes and mentalities are shaped by experience. Teachers need to provide daily opportunities for care if they want students to approach moral life prepared to care (p. 23). Daily consistent opportunities of caring and acknowledgement represent continuity and allow for confirmation. Martin Buber (1985) defines confirmation as the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. When we confirm someone we spot a better self and encourage its development (Noddings, 1992, p. 25). Through confirmation, students strengthen the relation of trust with their teachers. Miles Horton encourages continuity through opportunities of responsibility: “You have to look at people with two eyes. One eye sees what the person is now. The other sees what the person can become. You have to keep both eyes open all the time” (Lickona, 2004, p. 160).

Part of our identity is established by finding ways to belong within our community. Throughout our lives, our brains and minds change in response to their engagement with others (Elias, Arnold, & Steiger Hussy, 2003, p. 63). Depending on the

nature of the social relationships within which people find themselves, our learning can be profoundly influenced. Therefore, it is important that students are able to develop a trusting relationship with an adult in order to enhance and strengthen their learning and social development through life. For some students, their relationship with their teacher is more important than that of their parents (Noddings, 1992, p. 107). Regardless of the depth of the student/teacher relationship, it is essential that all students feel safe in relation to their teachers.

Today, there is little discussion centered on the quality of relationships needed for the healthy intellectual, moral, and emotional development of children. Jeffrey Pratt Beedy (2002) from the National Institute of Character shares, “Many students in today’s society have grown up in a world of drive-through relationships. Adults have to gain their trust. They have to see that you are real” (Lickona, 2004, p. 171). Because so many parents, despite their efforts and love, cannot model what it means to display and receive care, teachers are left with a necessary role to try their best to serve this function in the lives of these children (Noddings, 1992, p. 172).

Teachers are challenged to recognize, analyze, and effectively respond to the emotional issues that students bring to school with them on a daily basis. For this reason alone, there is no replacement teachers can have for having a good, caring relationship with their students (Elias, Arnold, & Steiger Hussy, 2003, p. 53). Thomas Lickona (2004) describes that a teacher-student relationship is a foundation of effective instruction. He continues to state that there are four symbolic outcomes in a devoted student-teacher relationship:

1. Helps students to feel loved and capable;
2. Motivates them to do and be their best, because they care about what the teacher thinks of them;
3. Makes it easier for the teacher and student to communicate and work together to overcome obstacles of learning;
4. Leads students to identify with their teacher and thereby opens them to the positive influence of the teacher's character expectations and personal example.

(Lickona, 2004, p. 114)

Teachers and students are equally responsible for creating and maintaining a growing, trusting relationship. In order to gain student trust, it is important that teachers try to see the world from the students' perspectives to move them to a greater understanding of the world. It is essential that students see their teachers as whole persons, not just instructors (Kessler, 2002, p. 23).

To create a real sense of relationship, we have to create, maintain, and enhance every opportunity of our present relationship. To feel a sense of belonging to school, students must be part of a community in the classroom where they can feel safe and heard. Opportunities such as this can be created through morning meetings, sharing circles, or social time together, allowing the students to feel safe to be vulnerable (Kessler, 2002, p. 23). It is, therefore, important that students are able to feel a sense of growing trust with their teacher.

When students feel connected with significant people in their lives, they are less likely to engage in behaviours that jeopardize their future. Studies show that research on resilience produces similar findings. Resilient children usually possess four strengths: social competence, problem-solving skills, a sense of identity, and hope for the future

(Lickona, 2004, p. 120). They often cite a special teacher who acted as a confident and inspiring role model when explaining how they have overcome obstacles in life.

Educator and writer, Jay Matthews, concludes, “In school, there is no greater motivation for students than the knowledge that at least one adult knows them well and cares about what happens to them” (Lickona, 2004, p. 120).

Being able to clearly and eloquently express oneself requires an emotional self-awareness and opportunities for self-expression. Marshall Rosenberg (2005) introduces a caring and compassionate language that can be used in the classroom in order to identify one’s needs. This language, also known as Giraffe language, focuses on an empathetic connection, otherwise known as hearing feelings and needs. When children are trained to express themselves by identifying their feelings and needs, they are more susceptible to understand their own value. By using this idea to express our wants and needs, we identify with the principle of “power with” not “power over” (p. 25). Rosenberg (2005) further suggests that the traditional adult “power over” approach brings forth violence and punishment to children. The “power over” approach is often heard as demands, resulting in a defensiveness and refusal. Conversely, the “power with” permits our needs to be heard as requests, which are more likely to be heard and accepted (p. 25).

Noddings (1992) emphasizes that teachers are in a significant position when in dialogue with their students. Because of this important relationship, dialogue should remain open-ended when displaying acts of caring (p. 23). As adults, we must remain clear in what we say to students, as our intention is to protect, rather than to punish. Rosenberg (2005) adds that the “most powerful thing we can do to begin a dialogue with

a person with whom we have a conflict is to communicate with them in a way in which they feel absolutely no criticism for what they're doing" (p. 39). This is crucial for teachers as they are so often put in the position of authority, telling their students what the best solution to the outcome may be. It is, therefore, important that while communicating, we are keeping our consciousness tuned in moment by moment to the beauty within others and ourselves, therefore creating an empathetic connection.

Conclusion

With the abundance of social changes in the recent decades, communities are left striving to familiarize and adjust to new expectations and new ways of life. Society today craves a community feeling where people feel cared for and are able to care for others. Because of this deep need and desire, schools play an influential role in creating and maintaining an effective caring environment. Children are thirsty for a sense of belonging and voice. Through positive relationships, equal dialogue, and opportunities to care, students are able to feel a sense of community in their classroom. With this caring community, students are more able to act with empathy and motivation, thereby enhancing their academic results and social self-esteem.

Courage and Soul within the Classroom

Education should be a source of nurturance for the spirit as well as a means of reaching understanding.

Linda Darling-Hammond (Lantieri, 2001, p. 7)

Introduction

The soul of education is the underlying foundation of what brings happiness and courage into the classroom. Mind, body, heart, and spirit come together to spark the

passion that fuels the motivation to learn, as well as to contribute and to savour our infinite capacity for growth (Kessler, 2002, p. 114). Through the presence of the soul when learning, one is able to take part in the interconnectedness of life. Classroom environments acknowledging and inviting such experiences into children's learning, help students break down stereotypes, improve discipline, increase academic motivation, foster creativity, and keep more students in school (Kessler, 2002, p. xvii). This section of the literature review examines ideas from authors such as Nel Noddings, Daniel Goleman, Rachael Kessler, Linda Lantieri, Larry Brendtro and Martin Brokenleg who identify the importance of connecting meaning and purpose through learning.

Happiness plays a significant role when learning through meaning and purpose. When children display a willingness to come to school to learn, they exhibit happiness towards learning. Noddings (1992) describes this desire in which our children develop admirable talents, while becoming decent, loving people who will receive love and appreciation for family, as well as professional and community life (p. 45). The classroom setting is influential in creating a positive soul-nourishing learning environment.

Dr. Goleman has explicitly connected our feelings and our thinking, which correlate to teaching and thinking, by pointing out how the brain's emotional and executive areas are interconnected physiologically (Lantieri, 2001, p. 17). His summary of recent neuro-scientific research additionally informs us that when chronic anxiety, anger, or upset feelings are intruding on our children's thoughts, there is less room

available in working memory to process what they are trying to learn (Lantieri, 2001, p. 17).

With the rise of technology and change of family structure during the last decade, students spend less time at home in contact with people. Today, television, video games and computer screen time often replaces family time and contact with people. Dr. Carlsson-Paige (2001) recognizes that because children are searching for ways to feel accepted in their lives, they often find avenues of empowerment through teasing, bullying, or putting down other children (p. 22). Likewise, she suggests that influences such as entertainment violence increase aggressive behaviour and attitudes in children that desensitizes them to violence. This aggression often empowers children to tease, bully or put down other people (p. 26). Further, research displays that an increasing number of children are entering schools in crisis unprepared cognitively and emotionally to learn (Lantieri, 2001, p. 10). Dr. Lantieri's findings indicate that an estimated one out of five nine to seventeen year olds have a diagnosable mental disorder (Lantieri, 2001, p. 10). For these reasons, she believes that an increasing number of children are entering schools in crisis-unprepared cognitively and emotionally to learn (Lantieri, 2001, p. 10). It is therefore important that happiness and soul continues to be acknowledged in the school system to promote a positive and healthy learning foundation.

In the 1990s, educators began to learn about spiritual intelligence (SQ). Dr. Danah Zohar and Dr. Ian Marshall did for spiritual intelligence, what Dr. Daniel Goleman did for emotional intelligence (Lantieri, 2001, p. 17). Through an array of research findings, their evidence suggested that there is a spiritual intelligence, known as

the ultimate intelligence, based on the third, neural system of the brain (Lantieri, 2001, p. 17). Zohar and Marshall define SQ, as “the intelligence in which we address and solve problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which we can place our actions and our lives in a wider, richer moving context. It is the intelligence with which we can assess that one course of action or one life span is more meaningful than another” (Lantieri, 2001, p. 17). In addition, they disclose that neither IQ nor EQ -emotional intelligence- can fully explain the complexity of human intelligence or the richness of the human soul (Lantieri, 2001, p. 17). The distinction they make between EQ and SQ is the following:

My emotional intelligence allows me to judge what situation I am in and then behave appropriately within it. This is working within the boundaries of the situation, allowing the situation to guide *me*. But my spiritual intelligence allows me to ask if I want to be apart of this particular situation in the first place. Would I rather change the situation, creating a better one? This is working *with* the boundaries of the situation, allowing me to guide the situation. (Lantieri, 2001, p. 18)

The Role of the Educator

Educators play a significant role in fostering the soul’s learning environment within the classroom. Palmer, Jackson, Jackson and Sluyter (2001) acknowledge the importance of creating and maintaining a connection between the teacher and student. Their research suggests: “Good teachers possess much more than information and technique; they possess a capacity for connectedness” (p. 132).

Courage, additionally, has a significant responsibility for reaching the student’s soul to happiness. Larry Bendtro and Martin Brokenleg (2001) have advocated their research on child development principles and have titled their synthesis the “Circle of

Courage” (p. 41). This concentrates on four developmental needs of children: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity while corresponding closely to universal human patterns such as attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism (p. 42). Bendtro and Brokenleg’s Circle of Courage acts as a guide to present the necessary questions to discover the answers within ourselves (p. 50). Through this discovery, students and teachers are able to discover a deeper connection with others, thereby enhancing their relationships and their learning.

Establishing and modelling authentic, respectful relationships is key when promoting successful connections among students and adults. Rachael Kessler (2002) addresses how the success of young people is related to their connections and relationships. Her research has addressed that when young people feel a significant bond with an adult who actively chooses to share precious time and wisdom, they develop a profound nourishment of the soul (Kessler, 2002, p. 20). Bendro, Brokenleg and Van Beckern (1990) further describe this as the spiritual development that is interwoven with healthy emotional psychological development (as cited in Kessler, 2002, p. 19). For many children, their school is a significant environment for this to take place.

Teachers play an influential role in their student’s lives by providing and creating opportunities for spiritual growth within the school environment. Establishing and maintaining a soul-nourishing classroom is essential when bringing an interest and connection to learning. Rachael Kessler (2002) identifies seven meaningful gateways to the Soul of Education:

1. The yearning for a deep connection,
2. The longing for silence and solitude,

3. The search for meaning and purpose,
4. The hunger for joy and delight,
5. The creative drive,
6. The urge for transcendence,
7. The need for initiation.

(Kessler, 2002, p. 17)

Kessler (2002) further infers that each gateway, secularly connected to an overlapping gateway, acts as a passage to connect the students' souls. Her first gateway, yearning for a deep connection, focuses on the need for deep, caring relationships while the longing for silence and solitude enhances the calm avenue of stillness, and reflection. The second gateway, the search for meaning and purpose, explores the larger picture of life; enabling students to self reflect on, "*What am I doing here?*" Play, celebration, and gratitude follow, expressing the hunger of joy and delight. The most influential is the creative drive, allowing students to have the opportunity to explore an entirely new lens of life, feeling the awe of mystery in creativity. Subsequently, her sixth gateway, the urge of transcendence acknowledges the desire of young people to go beyond their perceived limits. Finally, her last gateway, the need for initiation guides students to become more conscious of transitions from childhood and adulthood (p. 17). Each of these gateways represents a distinctive means for teachers to encourage their students' connection to the essential source of learning: the soul. She further acknowledges that each gateway is not distinct, but overlaps and interacts for each student, individually (Kessler, 2002, p. 16). Kessler's research suggests that inviting the soul into the classroom helps students increase their motivation to learn, stay in school, strengthen ties

to family and friends, and approach adult life with vitality, character and vision (Palmer (2000) as cited in Kessler, 2002, book jacket).

Creativity plays a purposeful role in connection to the soul. The process of creativity not only replenishes the soul through the arts, but also it enhances the way challenges are met in every domain of the curriculum of life (Kessler, 2002, p. 91). It is a way of thinking, learning, and expressing oneself that goes beyond the arts in the entire way we understand and relate to the world. Howard Gardner (1999) describes creativity as being open to the unknown. “Surprise is the experience that plays a part at the birth of an idea and during the work itself. Having an open mind, remaining flexible, willingness to trust hunches, and curiosity are factors that emerge repeatedly as facilitation favouring creativity” (Kessler, 2002, p. 99).

Acknowledging the soul in education requires taking risks. Research suggests that highly creative people make more mistakes than their less imaginative peers (Goleman, Kauffman & Ray, 1992, p. 43 cited in Kessler, 2002, p. 107). Expressing oneself, or putting things together in a creative way requires vulnerability and exposure. To ensure that students learn from situations that do not work, instead of experiencing what is identified as failure, it is important that educators allow their students to learn from their mistakes. Goleman, Kauffman & Ray (1992) identify the process of problem solving a mistake as an experiment to learn from - allowing one to realize valuable information of what to try next (p. 43 cited in Kessler, 2002, p. 107). In order to be able to have the courage to take risks students must feel safe in their learning environment (Kessler, 2002, p. 107).

Service learning also facilitates a soulful connection with one's self and learning. In order to develop socially, people must, at some time or another, bring action to their purpose. Brendtro explains, "Young people cannot develop a sense of their own values unless they have opportunities to be of value to others" (as cited Kessler, 2002, p. 71). An active participation in community life also leads to an essential source of happiness. Noddings (2003) identifies three ways in which serving others can contribute to happiness:

1. Volunteers find congenial company and derive happiness,
2. Those who volunteer feel and respond to the needs of others,
3. Volunteers are often aware that their work sustains the spirit of the community.

(p. 237)

Activities such as packing and delivering goods to the hungry or sitting with a lonely elder enable students to experience the simple gifts of being present with an open heart. When children feel that they are needed and have developed a sense of connection, they begin to enter the soul of education.

There is a distinction between recognizing and supporting spirituality and propagating or establishing a particular religion (Bendtro, Brokenleg, 2001, p. 44). As the pendulum moves to concentrate specifically on academic performance in classrooms and schools, the spiritual realm of education continues to lose its place in non-religious public schools. Concerns about the separation of church and state have led schools to compartmentalize minds, hearts, and souls (Carlsson-Paige, 2001, p. 18). "To young children, these are not separate, although they quickly learn to divide them once they get

to school” (Carlsson-Paige, 2001, p. 18). As a result, public school classrooms are left spiritually empty and continue to be designed in that manner; for decades, educators have allowed fear to keep the spiritual dimension out of schools. Simple acts of acknowledging the soul in the classroom create a significant shift in student’s learning and relationship development. Spirituality, connection, courage and soul play a profound role in student’s happiness and their desire to learn.

Conclusion

Connections, courage and the soul are essential for a healthy educational development. The need to acknowledge spirituality in today’s classrooms is called for more than ever before. As educators learn more about the importance of happiness, connection, courage, soul-filled creativity, and service within their classrooms, their students’ souls align to learning. With this connection, there is space to develop a sense of gratitude and belonging in oneself. Teachers act as agents in establishing a soul-filled classroom environment and have the potential to shift the future of the younger generation as they learn in their schools. The positive choices educators make in the educational system today about nourishing spiritual development in schools will have a positive impact on the generations to come.

CHAPTER THREE.

CONDUCT OF ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify and examine factors that contribute to elementary students' emotional success in their classrooms. Specifically, I chose to measure methods in which elementary teachers can empower grade 4/5 students to participate in a classroom community of character through meaning and purpose. This chapter is intended to explain the research design and methods used in this action research study. By using qualitative gathering tools and data analysis methods, I explored themes and concepts of how the elements of the classroom organization lead to student emotional success.

Research Approach

An action research approach requires a willingness to be open to change in order to enrich our way of being. Stringer (1999) defines action-based research as being more broadly understood as “disciplined inquiry research” which seeks focused efforts to improve the quality of people’s organizational, community, and family lives (p 9). While action research pertains to both qualitative and quantitative methods, its results enable a commitment of betterment to its area of study. Stringer (1999) further summarizes that “it is oriented towards ways of organizing and enacting professional and community life that are democratic, equitable, liberating and life-enhancing” (p. 188).

Qualitative research involves researchers who seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world that experience it (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). An action

researcher who focuses on qualitative research must recognize and understand the experiences that take place from the participants' perspective. Throughout the education system, action research has emphasized the verb "action." It is considered the discipline of inquiry in the context of focused efforts to improve the quality of an organization and its performance (Calhoun, 1994, p. 7). In this project, I have chosen to implement methods of qualitative research pertaining to the classroom curriculum and learning environment of a grade 4/5 academic setting. I have also recognized and considered the experiences from my participants' (the students in my classroom) perspective.

The action involved in my research is focused on social emotion and peer acknowledgement from the students' perspective in the classroom environment. The information gathered through qualitative means goes through the cycles of observing, reflecting, and acting (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Stringer, 1996 in Glesne, 1999, p. 13). This project has assisted me in gaining personal and professional development by learning and expanding my knowledge in teaching.

Calhoun (1994) identifies the sources of data for action research in three concrete steps. The first begins with existing archival sources involving the information we already have and know, followed by conventional sources requiring communication, observation, or follow-up. Her final concrete step concludes with inventive or elaborate sources important to products or performance (p. 56). These three steps allow the researcher to collect a balance of both behavioural and perceptual data such as student learning logs, observations, identified feelings, opinions, and values (p. 57). Calhoun

further suggests that the data be collected whenever possible. She refers to six questions to consider when analyzing and interpreting the data:

Common data analysis questions:

1. What important points do these data reveal?
2. What patterns or trends show up? How can they be explained?
3. How do data from various sources-test scores, grades, surveys, interviews, observations, and documents compare or contrast?
4. Do any correlations seem important?
5. Are there results that are different from what you expected?
6. What actions are indicated?

(Calhoun, 1994, p. 81)

As professionals, we learn to conduct action research to support our practices and to enhance organizational life (Calhoun, 1994, p. 100). These specific data analysis guidelines highlight essential considerations when gathering curriculum-based data pertaining to the action research. Through this particular process, the students generate and experiment with new ways of learning as a group, thereby creating a rich learning dynamic and growth with their classmates.

Project Participants

Glesne (1999) identifies participant engagement as the foundation of action research throughout the research project (p. 29). She recognizes that although there may be various stakeholders participating in the action research, it is important to select research participants who will respond effectively to the research development: “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about

issues of central importance to the purpose of the research....” (Patton, 1990 in Gelsne, 1999, p. 29).

This research project included two sets of participants. The first group of participants consisted of 27 students within my grade 4/5 French Immersion class who took part in a series of activities and lessons integrated in our social studies and social responsibility curriculum. The second stage of action research included a face-to-face interview with an educator whom I have purposefully selected because of his significant influence in enhancing the social success and well being of students in his classroom. I felt the use of multiple data-collection participants would contribute to the authenticity of the data.

My grade 4/5 class consisted of 28 students, aged eight-ten, from a variety of ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. Each student received detailed information about the action research project in class and in the form of a newsletter during the second week of school in September 2005. Our conversation and newsletter outlined the details of the research project and identified the importance of having parental permission in order to use the students’ generated data for research purposes. Before seeking parental permission, it was necessary to receive student permission and informed consent. After introducing the research project and participation details to the students, each student had an opportunity to sign the letter of informed consent addressed specifically to the student. All 28 students showed interest in the project and agreed to participate by signing the letter of informed consent. For most students, this was the first opportunity they had to practise their signatures.

During a family barbecue evening later that same week, I arranged a meeting to inform the class parents of my action research project. Having already sent home a detailed newsletter about the action research project, I wanted to explain the details of the project and its relevance to the classroom curriculum. I responded to questions and concerns and outlined important ethical concerns and information. I found that the parents and families were very supportive and interested in the project; many of the permission forms were signed and returned that evening. Within two weeks, 27 out of 28 parents signed and returned the informed consent giving their children permission to take part in the action research data collection.

As the research was conducted within the classroom curriculum, I used the data from the students who had their parents' permission to participate. One student did not have parental permission to take part in the data collection. This student was not present when the action research data was collected in class. Thus, all grade 4/5 students who were in class at the time of the action research participated in the data collection.

The second stage of action research took part in a face-to-face interview with an experienced educator who significantly contributed to the creation of a positive learning environment within the education system. I purposefully selected this participant, as he was my personal fourth grade teacher during the 1983/84 academic school year. As a child, I was motivated by the organization and content of my grade four classroom. This significant teacher left me with memories that inspired a curiosity in me to explore education with meaning and purpose. I felt that an interview with this knowledgeable educator would guide and influence me in the educational system. I also believed that his

experiences would help answer my questions relating to student social and emotional development, as well as methods to create a positive classroom climate.

Not having had contact with this participant since grade four, I conducted extensive research to locate this research candidate. After several months of telephone calls, questions, e-mails, and letters, I finally made contact with this research participant, who agreed to take part in a face-to-face interview. I electronically sent him information pertaining to the interview, informed consent, and the proposed copy of the interview questions. We agreed to meet in mid-November at his house on Mayne Island, British Columbia.

Research Method and Tools

Empowering students to participate in a classroom community developing character through meaning and purpose included collecting data from both sets of participants: the classroom students and the interviewee. I developed classroom-based curriculum on the social studies' theme of Canadian Citizenship and Government to complement aspects of the grade 4/5 social responsibility learning outcomes (refer to appendix for details). Using the same curriculum resources, I further organized a face-to-face interview with my interview participant pertaining to his experiences with social responsibility in the classroom.

Triangulation, a term taken from surveying and navigation, is a practice of data collection that relies on multiple methods of collection (Glesne, 1999, p. 31). Denzin (1988) believes "that although multiple data-collection methods is the most common form of triangulation in qualitative research, triangulation in order to increase confidence

in research findings may also involve the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources, multiple investigators, and multiple theoretical perspectives” (as cited in Glesne, 1999, p. 31). I, therefore, chose to rely on three different data collection methods.

The grade 4/5 social studies and social responsibility curricula are very pertinent to my research question, and therefore, were as the basis of my research. Furthermore, by exploring the definition of a Canadian citizen, the class identified the essential qualities and characteristics of our community, each other, and our individual selves. Through implementing this curriculum in the classroom, I initiated two specific research approaches to identify the emotional growth and awareness of the students and their classroom community. I organized the two curriculum lessons into two distinct phases in order to generate research data in a respectful manner with the students. As the project participants were French immersion students, the two curriculum lessons were integrated into English language arts, and all necessary data was collected in English.

The first phase of data gathering took place in a large focus group. I choose the use of focus groups, with the “intent to generate new ideas and background information” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 15). Kreuger (1988) describes focus groups as “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (p. 18). Essentially, focus groups tend to involve up to a maximum of 12 participants; however, because of the class size and environment with which I was working, I adapted the approach. As we were discussing and concentrating on the aspects of community and community involvement within our social studies curriculum, this activity fit well as a method for data collection.

The second phase of data collection with the classroom participants consisted of a large learning circle organized one month following the class focus group. I chose to have the class participate in a learning circle to encourage the connection among members of the classroom community, as well as to provide an opportunity to listen to each others' ideas and comments. This process encouraged authenticity among the project participants: "Circles support each member to find her or his own voice and to live more courageously" (Bolen, 1999, p. 3). The use of a learning circle in the classroom provided an opportunity for positive communication among peers where each individual had an opportunity to speak one at a time in a large class circle. "Learning circles are built upon the idea that every member has something to contribute and that every member has something to learn" (Sierra Health Foundation, 2005).

As this data collection took place over a two-month period, I collected field notes in addition to the curriculum research data to increase the relevancy and credibility of the data. The field journal included "descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations" as well as various "hunches and notes about patterns that seem to emerge" (Glesne, 1999, p. 49). Collecting observations throughout the data collection period allowed me to reflect on my own research biases as well as the importance of validity.

To triangulate the research data, I conducted a face-to face interview with an experienced "role-model" educator. Having conducted the majority of my research data with student participants (aged 8-10 years) from my class, the option of a face-to-face interview with an experienced educator outside of my work environment allowed an opportunity for a detailed depth of response. As Stinger (1999) states, "Interviews enable

participants to describe their situation. The interview process not only provides a record of their views and perspectives but also symbolically recognizes the legitimacy of their views” (p. 68). As I was a student of the interviewee twenty-one years prior, I was interested in knowing how this educator conducted, organized, and implemented the “magic” that took place in his classroom. Merriam (1998) reminds us that the main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information. “The researcher wants to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind” (p. 71). The positive experience I had as a child in his classroom-generated curiosity in me as a teacher. I felt eager and prepared to learn from this educator’s experiences.

After receiving informed consent from the interview participant, I began to organize the steps of the interview process. Palys (2003) states, “Face to face interviews tend to be more detailed, tend to seek greater depth of response, and tend to be more open-ended in construction to allow for phenomenological input from respondents” (p. 160). Knowing that I had some specific questions to pose, but also wanting flexibility to follow unexpected leads, I organized the interview to be “structured,” yet “open” (Glesne, 1999, p. 93). Further, it was important to acknowledge various ethical considerations, such as anonymity, privacy, confidentiality and exploitation, as well as to establish a sense of trustworthiness, prior to and during, the interview process. “Time at your research site, time spent interviewing, and time spent building sound relationships with respondents all contribute to trustworthy data” (Glesne, 1999, p. 151).

By choosing to work with my students and the interviewee in the data collection process, I felt that I selected research participants who would effectively respond to the

“rich information” and research development of the major project. I was interested in developing a better understanding of the fundamental importance of creating, implementing, and supporting a positive classroom climate. I felt that my research participants would provide me with a resourceful perspective.

Study Conduct

After researching various focus groups, learning circles, and interview models, I created my research plan and schedule. I then commenced the applied research by collecting information on how students can succeed in a positive classroom environment. Before this research started, I recognized that there were several opportunities for collecting data - especially since I was incorporating the research within the social studies 4/5 and social responsibility curricula. I wanted to ensure that the research opportunities were pertinent to the classroom curricula, as well as aligned to the literature and supporting ideas I was researching.

I planned a three-phase data process to collect the research, taking place over a two-month period. Initially, I wanted to begin the first focus group at the beginning of October, when we were concentrating on the importance of community participation and classroom roles within our social studies curriculum. After an unexpected two-week, province-wide teacher strike, I did not return to the classroom until the last week of October. This moved my schedule one month behind. Fortunately, I had incorporated extra time between the proposed methodologies for unexpected circumstances within my research schedule and proceeded as necessary when returning to class.

Even though my data collection was officially delayed, commencing the collection after the two-week teacher strike had its benefits. Firstly, the majority of the students were excited to return to school for both social and academic reasons. Secondly, I found that the students had a greater appreciation for learning and for the services teachers provided. Focusing on the classroom community, after having it taken away for two weeks, was a privilege for most of the students. I found that the students were eager to begin our social studies focus as well as the data collection process. My data collection took place from the last week of October 2005 to the last week of November 2005 (see Table 2).

Table 2

Research Plan: Data Collection

Research Methodologies “Triangulation Approach”	Expected Timeline of Applied Methodologies
Class Focus Group	End of October
Face-to-Face Interview	Mid- November
Class Learning Circle	End of November

Focus Groups

After having identified the guidelines and expectations of our classroom community following the teacher strike, I orchestrated an opportunity for the participants to understand their sense of belonging within their classroom community. The first part of the classroom collection took place in the form of a focus group during the afternoon of October 28, 2005. The purpose and intent of the focus group were to allow the

students to identify the essentials of a community and to investigate the actions needed for improvement. The wording and vocabulary of the themes were adjusted to a grade 4/5 level and understanding. Students were asked to concentrate on “*the essential characteristics of a classroom community*”; “*what makes our classroom a positive learning community*”; and “*what we need in our classroom to make it one step better than what it is.*”

My focus group consisted of 27 energetic grade 4/5 students who were eagerly anticipating the arrival of Halloween. I organized six small groups of four to five students to concentrate on and discuss one of the three focus questions formatted on a large chart paper. Before the activity officially began, I presented each focus question to the class and incorporated a brainstorm session together. This clarified any questions or concerns and distinguished the meaning of each focus question. As a class, we reviewed the essential guidelines and regulations of the research activity, emphasizing the importance of the data collection and behaviour during this time. The class atmosphere was respectably serious suggesting that the students were ready to begin the data collection (see Table 3).

Table 3

Focus Groups: Understanding Our Community

Focus Group	Focus Question
Focus Group 1	“What are the essential characteristics of a classroom community?”
Focus Group 2	“What makes our classroom a positive learning community?”
Focus Group 3	“What do we need in our classroom to make it one step better than what it is?”

Students used the space on the floor of the classroom to discuss, articulate, and write their ideas with felt pens on the chart paper. Two copies of each question were placed on large formatted chart paper in order to involve each of the six small groups. Students were given 10-12 minutes to discuss amongst themselves and formulate their responses on the chart paper. After this period, the questions and chart paper were circulated to the next group. Three focus sessions were allotted in order for each group to respond to each of the focus questions. As a teacher in the research facilitator role, I circled the area questioning when needed, allotting new chart paper when necessary, and photographing the completed chart paper with a digital camera as a means of saving the data on my computer. After each group successfully responded to each of the three questions, I collected each chart paper and reviewed the ideas as a large group. This allowed me to clarify their data and validate their responses before moving to the next step of the data collection. The students were thanked for the great ideas, discussions, cooperation, and behaviour during the afternoon. I then observed and organized the data into corresponding themes. The digital photographs were downloaded and saved into my computer for back-up purposes.

Face-to-face Interview

The second phase of data collection took place in mid-November. This phase consisted of a face-to-face interview with an experienced educator who played an important role in fostering student emotional and academic success. As a former student of this educator, I was deeply enriched and inspired by his teaching methods as he consciously orchestrated opportunities for students to succeed socially, emotionally, and

academically. My intention to meet with him was to discover, from a teacher's perspective, his reasoning and methods to create success for his students. As his experiences ranged from being a classroom teacher, school administrator, and teacher education instructor, I knew that by meeting with him, his experiences would provide me with a wealth of information and direction for my research project.

Between the time of the initial contact and interview date, I had time to review, revise, and reflect on the proposed interview questions. As most of the interview questions were derived from the grade 4/5 Social Responsibility Standards (refer to appendix), I felt that it was appropriate that he have access to these documents before the actual interview. I electronically sent him a word document of the proposed questions, Social Responsibility Standards, and participant informed consent. I also attached a copy of my proposed research question and sub-questions to provide him with the scope of my research. I assured him that the interview content would remain confidential, as would all data collected for my research project.

The face-to-face interview took place on November 12, 2005 at his home on Mayne Island, British Columbia. I felt privileged that he had invited me to his home for the interview process and was looking forward to meeting with him on a professional level. Upon arriving at Mayne Island, we recognized one another at the ferry dock, and began our journey to his home. The journey gave us time for reacquainting and reminiscing before we began the official interview process.

The official interview took place over a period of one hour and twenty minutes. I had intended to record the interview with an audio-recorder, but circumstances at the time

made it impossible for me to do so. Instead, I took notes and summarized major points from the responses and stories that he shared. Listening to and engaging in his responses were first and foremost “as feedback can be both verbal and nonverbal” (Glesne, 1999, p. 81). I referred to the interview questions that I had created and was conscious to probe for more information with open-ended responses. After the interview, I summarized our conversation and shared the information that I had received. We had agreed that if additional questions arose, I would be able to contact him through telephone or e-mail. I thanked him for his openness in participating in my interview and for his generosity during my visit to Mayne Island. He provided me with eight textbooks covering information that we had discussed and ideas that would be pertinent to my research.

I felt very privileged to have taken part in a face-to-face interview with someone whom I had admired since I was nine years old. Not only did he provide me with a wealth of information and direction for my research project, but he also made helpful recommendations and strategies to use in the classroom. On a personal level, I felt that this interview was a rich experience, and I was honoured to re-establish contact with such a role model on a professional level.

Learning Circles

During the last few weeks of November, the social studies classroom curriculum was linked to the Dixon Elementary School social responsibility curriculum. Students were developing their leadership skills through a school-wide focus on role models, choices, and goals. A Canadian Olympic Wrestler from the “Esteem-Team” presented an inspirational talk to students on leadership. Meanwhile, as part of the social studies

curriculum on positive Canadian citizens, the students were identifying a personal, inspirational role model. Students recognized their role models' abilities, characteristics, and contributions to the community. Students reflected on their choices and wrote paragraphs explaining why they chose their specific role model. Once the students felt comfortable identifying the qualities of an inspirational role model, they were asked to identify their own personal, positive characteristics and attributes in order to recognize their strengths as positive Canadian citizens. Students were asked to reflect and take notes on the following four questions:

1. What makes you a positive citizen in our classroom community?
2. What qualities identify you as a positive Canadian citizen?
3. What can other students expect to see from you in the classroom community?
4. What positive values and characteristics can students acknowledge me for?

Students identified and recorded their own personal positive attributes on paper and shared their reflections with the class. As the students shared, the rest of the class was asked to take notes. Students recorded notes pertaining to each individual student on a large piece of white paper. Together, as a class, we identified attributes for any members of the class who were absent that day. These observations were also recorded with the rest of the notes. Students kept this large piece of paper for reference throughout the week.

Later that day, I introduced students to a class activity titled "Peer Citizenship Investigation." I called students to my desk individually to pull three names from the class jar (a jar with each student's name recorded on a stick). The students took note of the students' names, as they were to observe their positive qualities and actions during

the remainder of the week. The students referred to their detailed class list of observations on the large piece of white paper previously recorded that day in order to identify some key points to assist their observation. Further, as a class, we spoke about confidentiality and the importance of keeping their observations to themselves. Because it was each student's task to observe three peers, it also meant that three peers would observe each student. During the next three weekdays, students recorded at least one observation of each of their three students on a piece of paper titled "Positive Student Acknowledgements" located in a leadership notebook. The "Peer Citizenship Investigation" took place in confidence from Monday morning to Thursday afternoon.

During the afternoon of Thursday, November 24, 2005, the students formed a large class circle on the floor to take part in our class learning circle. As a class, we discussed the rules and regulations of the circle, the importance of listening to others, respecting others' ideas, and speaking only when it is one's turn. Students brought their leadership notebooks to the circle in order to refer to their notes and observations from the week.

A peacock's feather was passed around the circle in a clock-wise direction allowing each student to have a turn to speak. Once receiving the peacock's feather, the student acknowledged one of the three peers he or she had observed during the week. The students used the language "*I would like to acknowledge -- for.....*" or "*I congratulate -- for*" Once the student completed the acknowledgement, he or she passed the peacock feather to the next student. Because each student was to acknowledge

three peers in the class, the feather circled the class three times, allowing each person to recognize one student at a time.

The class learning circle came to a close near the end of the day. I collected each student's "Positive Peer Acknowledgements" sheet from his or her leadership notebook to add to my classroom data collection. This would help me to review their observations and theme their ideas. As a contribution to the learning circle, I asked for volunteer students interested in staying behind after school for 10-15 minutes for a short discussion about the afternoon's activity. Six students (five female and one male) enthusiastically volunteered to remain after school and were excited to share their ideas. As we sat around the class table, I explained that I would be using this dialogue as part of my research data only and expressed that I would not evaluate their conversation for the upcoming report card. I acknowledged that they chose to be here and thanked them for wanting to take part in this little discussion. I continued to ask the students the following three questions, one at a time, allowing time for each student to share their ideas:

1. How did you feel when your peers acknowledged your positive qualities you contributed in the classroom?
2. Were you surprised by their observations?
3. How did you feel when you were able to give someone a positive acknowledgment?

The discussion took place for approximately 15 minutes. I recorded each student's ideas and responses on a piece of paper in order of the dialogue. I thanked the students for sharing their ideas, their authentic participation, as well as their respectful

attitudes. I added my recorded notes to the classroom data collection in order to examine the merging trends and themes.

The following day, I began the class with a personal reflective journal entry about the class learning circle the previous day. I wrote three questions on the white-board and asked each student to respond to each question in a journal entry.

1. How did I feel when a peer acknowledged my qualities and actions in class?
2. How did I feel when I acknowledged a peer's qualities and actions?
3. What did I learn from this experience?

I assured the students that no one would be reading these journal entries other than me, and each response would be used as research data. Additionally, I assured the students that this journal entry would not be evaluated for spelling or grammar nor would it be used for reporting purposes. I collected the journal entries and filed them with the remainder of the research data generated from class. Later that evening, I read the journal entries searching for corresponding and reoccurring themes. I examined and arranged the data for reoccurring themes, concepts, and threads.

Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (1999) describe data analysis as “the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretations to the mass of collected data” (p. 150). Knowing that my research data would change and solidify throughout the research journey, I found it beneficial to collect thoughts, reflections, and field notes throughout the course of the data collection. Corrine Glesne (1999) reminded me of the importance of the data process: “Data analysis done simultaneously with data collection enables you to focus

and shape the study as it proceeds” (p. 130). This section will outline how I classified, collated, and themed my data in order to identify content for ethnographies and for participants’ “truths” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150).

There were three main phases of the action research project that required data analysis: the class focus group identifying a classroom community; the face-to-face interview highlighting teaching concepts relating to courage, meaning and purpose; and finally, the data derived from the students’ experiences and acknowledgements during the class learning circle. In all cases, the data generated by the student participants and interviewee was integral to my research. The process of classifying key words, concepts, feelings, and understandings from each of these data collections has allowed me to theme properties and categories in order to have a general understanding of the theory behind the data.

Throughout the data collection, I sorted the information into two files: the process file which contains matters related to plans and data gathering reflections, and the content file which focuses on matters related to substance and reflection (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 131). By separating the information in these two categories, I had a clearer idea of how to concentrate and organize the information during the data analysis.

After sorting the data from each initial data collection, I themed and interpreted bibbits (loose bits of data) into data properties and categories (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 131). I glued notes and bibbits onto large chart paper to create a visual representation. I then used colour-coded Post-it notes to categorize the various themes. Inevitably, I had more than enough data and reminded myself of the “open nature of qualitative inquiry

.....acquir[ing] even more data than you originally envisioned” (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 134).

After using the same process for each of the research methodologies, I transformed the already themed data into ideas and concepts. Again, I used a large chart paper and interpreted the themes from each data collection into one comprehensive data analysis process. I kept my research question and sub-questions paramount to help clarify the data interpretation. This allowed me to move from organization to meaning - connecting and giving shape to my stories (Glesne, 1999, p. 149). According to Glesne (1999), “data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned” (p. 130).

I found the data collection and analysis required flexibility and self-discipline. As the classroom teacher and primary researcher - aware of each student’s academic and social capabilities - I found myself in a delicate situation. Because the majority of the data collection was with my students (aged eight to ten), I felt that it was necessary to have a colleague audit my fieldwork and subsequent analysis and interpretation (Glesne, 1999, p. 152). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this process promotes trustworthiness and validity of the data collection (as cited in Glesne, 1999, p. 152). I always believed that my data derived from the action research project would help “improve the quality of people’s organizational, community and family lives” (Stringer, 1999, p. 9).

Ethical Issues

Royal Roads University defines human subjects as living individuals. In accordance with the humanistic ethical obligations of the *Royal Roads University Research and Ethics Policy* (2004), learners who use human subjects during their projects must demonstrate the following:

1. Respect for Human Dignity.
2. Respect for Free and Informed Consent.
3. Respect for Vulnerable Persons.
4. Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality.
5. Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness.
6. Respect for Harms and Benefits.
7. Minimizing Harm.
8. Maximizing Benefit.

(Royal Roads University, 2004, p. 9)

Eiser and Peshkin (1990) identify that ethical issues are more likely to arise in educational settings (p. 247). Further, the anonymity of students, teachers, and parents who cooperate in research studies must be guaranteed (Richmond School District, 1999). Ethical values include honesty, fairness, respect for persons and beneficence, each being nonnegotiable. Teachers, acting as transparent role models for young students, have a daily ethical standard to model. Eiser and Peshkin (1990) further explain that students must be shown that ethics is an important part of the work of our professional community and not just a struggle of a personal sort: “Education is public trust. All who are given the power to shape and direct it have a great responsibility for the way that the lives of numerous human beings turn out” (p. 256).

Palys (2003) reinforces the fundamental importance of an ethical research relationship by stating, “As researchers, we have a humanistic obligation to treat people with dignity and to safeguard their interests; even critical inquiry requires us to look first for the moral high ground and to treat adversaries the way we would like them to treat us” (p. 81). Through examining ourselves in relationship with other people, we are able to measure the impact on people whose lives we document. Further, as classroom teachers, it is important that the following questions be acknowledged:

1. What are the likely consequences of this research? How well do they fit with my own values and priorities?
2. If I were a participant, would I want this research to be done? What changes might I want to make me feel comfortable?

(Zeni, 1998, p. 17)

As a researcher, it was essential that I made every effort to ensure that all information was confidential. As openness and honesty are two highly desired characteristics of the researcher-participant relationship, it was always important that the relationship maintained a shared understanding that all communication is confidential. This confirms the ethical responsibility that the rights and information of the research participants were protected.

CHAPTER FOUR.

ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

“How can I, as an elementary level teacher, empower grade 4/5 students to participate in a classroom community of character through meaning and purpose?” The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that contribute to a successful implementation of a character-based classroom predicated on purposeful learning. Because the classroom curriculum is designed to meet the academic expectations of the province, teachers are often left frustrated struggling to meet the diverse, prescribed learning needs within the classroom. The meaning and purpose is often neglected as a result of these demanding expectations. Because character education is not seen as an isolated program, but rather an integrated approach that permeates an entire classroom community, this information can be of great use to district staff interested in enriching their classroom communities.

As outlined in Chapter 3, data was collected through three methods with two different groups of participants: a class focus group and learning circle, implemented throughout the grade 4/5 classroom curriculum, as well as a face-to-face interview with an educator. Twenty-seven students participated in the class focus group and learning circle in the span of a month. Students drew upon their previous classroom experiences (from kindergarten to grade 3/4) to answer and respond to questions. During the face-to-face interview, the educator responded and related to his experiences as a classroom teacher, school administrator, and university education instructor. Findings from this

chapter, based on the data analysis, highlight emerging themes and trends; evidence is provided through excerpts of collected data.

Study Findings

The students participated in two classroom-based data collection activities: the class focus group and the class-learning circle. All data analysed from these two activities are supported by student comments and ideas. The face-to-face interview also features excerpts supported by comments and ideas. Three common themes emerged from the data collections and are presented in chronological order: findings from the class focus group, interview, and learning circle are displayed under each theme.

Theme 1: Fostering Relationships and Connection

Focus Group Findings

In response to the three focus questions, “What are the essential characteristics of a classroom community?”; “What do we have in our classroom that makes it a positive learning community?”; and “What do we need in our classroom to make it excellent, one step better than what it is?” students identified rich ideas related to what they already knew, what they had experienced, and what they desired. Within their responses, the students incorporated creativity and imagination, which further allowed me to examine the themes beyond their responses.

Students commented on the desire to have more pets in the classroom. Examples of animals ranged from “quiet pets” such as fish, bunnies, guinea pigs, gerbils, hamsters, mice, owls, quiet birds, and lizards to “class pets” such as monkeys, dogs, and bats. Although the range of pets is quite diverse, it implies desire for a sense of tactile

connection and care. Children are able to display attributes such as care through their connection with animals.

Students also expressed an interest in their connection with their peers. Students displayed exceptional interest in school-wide and class-wide activities. They also mentioned their desire to work in partners, to co-operate, and to be placed in a desk group with friends. Students recognized friendship as an important aspect of the classroom community and identified the need to choose “smart friends,” “trusting friends,” and friends “as someone to talk to.” The emphasis on relationship and connection among peers in the class evolved as an emerging trend among the classroom community.

Interview Findings

The face-to-face interview illuminated the importance of a teacher’s relationship and connection with his or her students. When asked to speak about this during the interview, the interviewee commented, “Establishing a connection with the students is very important. Teachers need to know with whom they are dealing with and understand what their connection in class may be. Relationship is equally important. By knowing who this student is and what they are able to do allows the teacher to set them up for success.” He also commented on the significance of developing the “whole child.” “Developing the whole child to be able to meet socially and emotionally is critical. I always believe that academics are first and foremost the most important. Reading and writing comes first, but they are not going to come until the child develops socially and emotionally.” Further, he clarified that students use various means, whether they are aware of it or not, to develop the “whole child.” “I often think of the very shy students

and how their artwork may be an indication of the whole child. This will indicate to me that I need to *teach* them how to participate more in class, instead of *telling* them that they should be participating more in class.” The need to address the social and emotional needs before academic success is paramount. Part of building emotional and social competence is creating opportunities to build the inner confidence and belief. Connection and relationship are paramount when creating the opportunities for each individual child. By having connections with students, the teacher is able to create opportunities that will facilitate their students’ emotional and social success.

Learning Circle Findings

The class-learning circle provided some interesting ideas about emphasizing the importance of relationship and connection. Throughout the class learning circle, the students took turns positively acknowledging three peers. For some students, acknowledging a friend was not a difficult task; for others, it was less comfortable to acknowledge a peer with whom they were not interested in being friends. The journal entries and small discussion that took place following the learning circle produced some interesting insights. When asked how it felt to be recognized by class peers, students responded by using such terms as “encouraged,” “good-inside,” “positive,” “noticed,” and “special.” The students were further asked to comment on how it felt after they positively acknowledged a class peer. Some of the comments were as follows: “It felt good to acknowledge others”; “I know that the positive comments made them feel like positive citizens too”; “I felt good to give others a positive acknowledgement because I knew that I made others feel good”; and “I felt just as good when someone gave me an

acknowledgement as when I gave one to someone else.” This activity demonstrated the importance of connection among peers in the class. After being positively recognized by their peers, students displayed an intrinsic motivation to continue to model the characteristics for which what they had been acknowledged. The significance of fostering a positive connection and relationship emerged as a trend during the class-learning circle.

Theme 2: Contributing to the Classroom Community

Focus Group Findings

During the focus group, the students also displayed an interest in wanting to contribute to the classroom community. Students outlined the importance of class expectations and responsibilities, such as respect, rules and regulations, homework, chores, classroom jobs, and lending a hand. The need for communication was determined by identifying the importance of a student council representative in the class. Further, in responding to each of the focus group questions, students always mentioned aspects of valuing a calm classroom atmosphere. Students identified calming plants, a sitting area, reading area, a calm area with a book shelf, and comfortable pillows for reading as part of their classroom community. Not only do the students want to contribute to their own classroom community, they are interested in enjoying and taking part in the classroom atmosphere.

Interview Findings

Contributing to the community was a fundamental theme to emerge during the face-to-face interview. Reflecting on his personal experiences as classroom teacher and school administrator, the interviewee spoke eloquently on the importance of creating

activities and rituals that ensure everyone's contribution to the community. He stated, "Students need to identify their own responsibilities in the classroom - individually and in small groups. It is very important at the beginning of the year to introduce the classroom as 'our' classroom, therefore taking the necessary time to create the classroom regulations and expectations together as a group. This way, the students are able to belong to a group and act on the group's needs from the beginning. It also allows the students to be accountable for their own actions and expectations in the class." When asked to comment on the importance of establishing a caring community in the classroom, he responded, "Teachers must convey to the students that they are happy to be there. It is important to give it all of your imagination."

In addition, he described how every student stands out in the community in a different way: "Some students may not be able to take part in the large classroom community, but may feel comfortable taking part in a smaller group within the large classroom group. Some students with a shyer personality may not feel comfortable or safe within a large group, but will feel safe when they are working with a friend or small group of friends." By being a part of the classroom community, large or small, students feel that they are worthy of contributing their efforts. The interviewee further shared, "Every child needs to have some sort of recognition knowing that they were an important member of the classroom." By feeling as a member of the classroom community, students have a desire to continue to learn.

Learning Circle Findings

By taking part in the class learning circle, students were both contributing to the classroom community and creating it. Every student had something positive to contribute to the learning circle, regardless of the simplicity of his or her contribution. Students were acknowledged for being organized, displaying a positive attitude, helping, being respectful, calm and quiet, and making an effort to speak French in class. By acknowledging and sharing observations with the class, students felt a sense of acceptance and belonging in the classroom community.

When asked to reflect and respond in their journal on what they had learned from taking part in this exercise, students shared that “it doesn’t matter if you like the person- as long as you know them well”; “by saying something to make someone happy is great”; “everyone has a good part deep down inside them and that they are just as good as everyone else”; “anyone can acknowledge anyone in ways they cannot see.” Students not only displayed an interest in taking part in this activity, they had also expressed what they had learned from the situation. All journal entries displayed positive comments and reflections, indicating the importance of a sense of belonging within the class. Students intrinsically felt that they could go out of their way to contribute positively to the classroom community. Thus, contributing to the classroom community also demonstrated an acceptance among the members of the class.

*Theme 3: Promoting Character Development**Focus Group Findings*

The class focus group results indicated a trend of recognizing individual personal needs within the needs of the entire group. When focusing on the essential characteristics of the classroom community, the students recognized personal items needed for their individual learning, classroom necessities and regulations, as well as overall needs for the entire school. By identifying the classroom and school needs, students displayed a sense of responsibility within their own small and large communities. Through this identification of responsibility, students practised developing their character.

Students additionally noted several “class activities” as positive to their learning community. These current class activities already implemented in the classroom curriculum include projects, point systems, classroom currency, Canadian jeopardy, building games, and organizing bake sales. Each of these class activities had already been introduced in the class, yet the students were motivated to continue to take part in what they remembered as a positive experience. Group activities as such often bring out the best in each student as they provide opportunities to express excitement and imagination. Further, by working cooperatively in groups, they have an opportunity to develop good judgment, integrity, responsibility, and other virtuous characteristics. Children enjoy past experiences where they have favoured success; such opportunities expand their character development.

Interview Findings

Creating a community class environment equally contributes to the character development of students. In order to have the students become intrinsically motivated, it is important that teachers make an effort to use the proper language in dialogue. Such a choice in language promotes student desire to contribute to pupil-centred activities. Throughout the interview, the interviewee advocated that the choice of language is influential when instilling character and success within each individual. “By stating, ‘Gee, I really like the way you do that,’ is making the student want to do that again for your approval only. Instead, by mentioning, ‘Gee, it really looks like you know how to set up the volleyball nets’ allows the students to know that they are good at something and right now they may feel really good about setting up the volleyball nets.” The importance of using a language that focuses on the task and the success within the task, instead of expressing the feelings of the teacher, is imperative. When teachers are specific in identifying successes, noting when goals are met and new skills are learned, they promote the genuine confidence and self-reliance in the student- not the dependence on external praise. If teachers expect students to be able to recognize and value their own individual success, it is equally important to model and teach, *not tell*, how to do so. Long-term learning is more effective when we teach students to learn for their own sake, without wanting to please the teacher.

Learning Circle Findings

The class learning circle fostered character development among students. Firstly, the ability to give and receive peer acknowledgements is not a task to which students are

naturally accustomed. When asked immediately after the learning circle, “How did you feel when students in the class acknowledged your positive qualities?” students replied with the following comments: “At first it felt weird that people would say nice things like that to me, but then it felt really good. I am not used to having such great things said like that”; “I felt sort of selfish that people acknowledged me in so many great ways today. It made me feel really good inside”; and “I was surprised by their comments at first, and then it felt really good so I liked it.” Students displayed courage in taking part in the learning circle activities and further persevered to continue as it brought forth such positive feelings.

Additionally, taking risks not only became more comfortable among the students, but also it encouraged students to work harder. Some students commented on motivation and how being recognized was encouraging: “When I was acknowledged for working hard, it encouraged me to work harder and to keep on going”; “I felt even more confident and it gave me a positive attitude”; and “I gained more confidence when others said confident things.” Developing the courage to take risks and to feel comfortable doing so both motivated the students and encouraged perseverance, enabling the students to recognize their peers’ strengths and supporting them to work with the identified strengths. Character development continued to be an influential emerging theme during the class-learning circle.

Study Conclusions

Although I used three different methods of research to collect data from two different groups of participants involved in the research study, I developed the

conclusions from a consideration of both data and sources merged together. These conclusions can serve to inform classroom teachers and district administrators interested in fostering the emotional and social needs of their students by empowering them to become moral citizens and excellent leaders.

Conclusion 1: Students Desire Connections

The need to feel connected is an important social and emotional phenomenon enhancing future student behaviours. When students connect with a specific adult, friend, animal, or nature their social, emotional, and academic success results. By feeling a sense of connection with significant people in their lives, students are less likely to engage in behaviours that jeopardize their future. The Dalai Lama and Goleman (1992) emphasize the need for more opportunities and routines in order to promote opportunities of care. Because few people develop the skills to care for animals, plants, and people without direct hands-on practice, schools and classrooms need to emphasize more dialogue and activity focusing on the needs of objects of care (p. 124). The research data displays the students' desire for connection among peers and animals. Simple acts such as keeping the school grounds clean or throwing away trash enables children to exercise the genuine act of mindful caring (p. 124). Noddings (1992) suggests that those who are not reciprocates of care are at risk not only academically but also socially (p. 108). She further implies that teachers cannot be expected to teach their students how to care; rather, they need to concentrate on responding with growing sensitivity in attempts to promote their students' growth (p. 108). Students need to be and feel connected in order to enhance their social, emotional, and academic self-esteem.

Conclusion 2: Students Are People First

The relationship between the teacher and his or her students is paramount. Teachers are in an important position to recognize, without judgement, the potential of their students. During the face-to-face interview, the interviewee emphasized the importance of seeing students first as people. As teachers make the effort to get to know their students individually as a “whole person,” they are planting seeds of opportunity. Students must feel a sense of growing trust with their teachers - feeling safe within their presence. In order to gain trust, teachers must see the world from the eyes of a student. It is equally important that students see their teacher as a “whole person” and not just as an instructor (Kessler, 2002, p. 23). Likewise, the importance of the student/teacher relationship is reciprocal: “Students and teachers need each other. Students need competent adults to care; teachers need students to respond to their caring” (Noddings, 1992, p. 69). Dr. Lickona (2004) articulates, “Good teachers build the relationship in both directions; they and their students learn about each other” (p. 115). He further emphasizes, “You have to look at people with two sets of eyes. One eye sees what the person is now. The other sees what the person will become. You have to keep both eyes open all the time” (p. 160). When students observe the devoted character of their adult teacher, they are more able to demonstrate ethical behaviour and choice. For some students, the relationship with their teacher is more important than that of their parents (Noddings, 1992, p. 107).

*Conclusion 3:**Students Require Opportunities to Contribute to the Classroom Community*

To develop a generation of healthy human beings, it is important to offer them a compassionate environment when they are small (The Dalai Lama & Goleman, 1992, p. 2). Society today craves a community feeling where people feel cared for and are able to care for others. Part of a student's identity is finding ways to belong within their community. To feel a sense of belonging in the class, student participation within the classroom community - where their true identity can be seen and heard - is essential. Through active participation, students are more able to act with empathy and motivation, enhancing their social self-esteem and academic results. Both being a member of the classroom and contributing to the classroom community are equally important. The research data collected from the class-learning circle describes this necessity. Kessler (2002) suggests that opportunities to orchestrate student contribution can be created through morning meetings, sharing circles, or social time together - allowing the students to feel safe and to be vulnerable (Kessler, 2002, p. 23).

Research points to the significance of the brain and social / emotional development. Renate Caine and Geoffrey Caine (1997) describe "the brain as a social brain" and explain that "throughout our lives, our brains/minds change in response to their engagement with others. Learning, therefore, is profoundly influenced by the nature of the social relationships within which people find themselves" (as cited in Elias, Arnold, & Steiger Hussy, 2003, p. 63). By participating in positive relationships, equal

dialogue, and opportunities to care, students feel a sense of community in their classroom creating a positive response in the brain.

Conclusion 4: Character Development Weaves Through the Curriculum

A character-valued curriculum cannot be taught in isolation. The deliberate, proactive effort to develop good character in children, or to teach children right from wrong, must be integrated through classroom curriculum and everyday routines (Lickona, 1994). The data collected throughout the focus group, interview, and class-learning circle describe the importance of integrating character-rich activities throughout the curriculum. The National Association of School Psychologists (2003) concludes that students who display good character possess aspects of moral knowing, feeling, and action. Further, when positive behaviour becomes habitual, it often leads to moral behaviour. Noddings (1992) suggests the importance of concentrating on moral behaviour by stating, “Moral life so defined should be frankly embraced as the main goal of education. Such an aim does not work against intellectual development or academic achievement. On the contrary, it simplifies a firm foundation for both” (p. 173).

Additionally, Dr. Berkowitz affirms the importance of modelling respect through character development. He states, “The school is the most powerful moral influence we have in the way we treat each other” (Berkowitz as cited by Lickona, 2004, p. 174). He further outlines, “Informal curriculum is the most influential: informal curriculum is generated from life into the school” (Berkowitz, 1998). Activities such as appreciation time, story telling, class meetings, or role-playing provide opportunities to students to develop positive character traits among their peers in class (Lickona, 1992, pp. 99-100).

The key to implementing these values and virtues is through modelling the hidden aspects of the informal curriculum: “You must be the change in the world you want to see” (Gandhi as cited in Lickona, 2004, p. 118)

Conclusion 5:

Peer Recognition Increases Student Motivation, Risk-Taking and Self-Confidence

The research data demonstrates that recognition by peers increases student self-confidence and motivation to learn. Students receive just as much intrinsic motivation when they acknowledge their peers as when they receive a positive acknowledgement from their peers. Peer recognition is a symbol of safety. When recognizing or being recognized, students are creating a safer environment –open to vulnerability. Martin Buber (1985) believes in the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others and suggests, “When we confirm someone we spot a better self and encourage its development” (as cited in Noddings, 1992, p. 25).

Moreover, learning requires the courage to take risks, to move forward, and to learn from mistakes. Feeling safe in the class environment enables one to take risks and enhance learning. Brain research indicates a positive emotional link between the teaching and learning process. As learning is an active, not a passive activity, research contends that the environment helps shape the individual brain (Wolf, 2001, p. 120). Additionally, because the brain is a flexible, self-adjusting unique living system, it is biologically programmed to attend first to information that has strong emotional content (Wolf, 2001, p. 87). Learning is unsuccessful when one is afraid and unsafe.

Conclusion 6: Adult Choices Are Influential

Teachers, as adults, have an influential role in modelling student success. Carr (1991) argues that modeled behaviour of adults in schools is the single most effective influence on the development of the moral character in students (Berkowitz, 1998). The collected research data suggests that such a significant role enables adults to teach by modelling what they would like to see in their students. Barbara Luther (2002) reminds us that “if we want students to be respectful, we have to model respect. We cannot teach where we do not go” (as cited in Lickona, 2004, p. 111). By expecting a specific behaviour from students without modelling an example of what we would like to see, we are omitting the most important detail. As an adult, this requires a conscious awareness. “A child is the only known substance in which responsible adults can be made. To optimally educate children to be responsible young adults, we need to understand more fully what it takes to be a responsible adult” (Berkowitz, 1998).

Moreover, language is an important tool when influencing effective behaviour. The use of language by adults when interacting with students is paramount. Rosenberg (2005) identifies the importance of expressing oneself by using a “power with” language approach in place of a “power over” approach (p. 25). As a “power over” approach is often heard as demands, resulting in defensiveness and refusal, a “power with” approach permits a teacher needs to be heard as requests, which are more likely to be heard and accepted (Rosenburg, 2005, p. 25). Noddings (1992) adds that when displaying acts of caring, the dialogue should remain open-ended (p. 23). Intending to protect students and not punish them, teachers must remain clear in their dialogue. “The most powerful things

we can do to begin a dialogue with a person with whom we have a conflict is to communicate with them in a way in which they feel absolutely no criticism for what they're doing" (Rosenburg, 2003, p. 39). Thus, an adult's choice of language has an impact on student's behaviour.

Scope and Limitations of the Research

All students benefit from a concentration of character development that brings meaning and purpose to their learning community. Everyone enjoys being appreciated, loved, cared for, and acknowledged when feeling a sense of belonging within his or her community of people. This major project emphasizes the importance of fostering a community of students to develop their character through a meaningful and purposeful education.

This research project took place in a grade 4/5 classroom with students ages 8-10 years of age. Although the proposed conclusions derived from the emerging themes of data, they are most beneficial in an educative setting and community environment. The proposed activities used to facilitate this undertaking were age related and chosen for the grade 4/5 age group. The same activities may not be as beneficial for an upper-intermediate or high school level group of students. There are many age related proposed activities, however, available to foster and generate the same student outcome-success.

Data from this project could have been derived from other sources within the school community; however, I chose to work closely with the students in my classroom largely because of the integrated curriculum opportunities available at this grade level. I also thrived from student enthusiasm, awareness, courage, and innocence at this age and

grade level. In addition to working with the students in the class, I chose to conduct a face-to-face interview with one single teacher. As the data is represented from the views of only one experienced teacher, I felt that it would be more beneficial to conduct one in-depth interview relating to past successful teaching experiences in the classroom.

Further, I also felt that I was also very fortunate to re-connect with my personal grade four teacher, twenty-one year previous, in the face-to-face interview. These two opportunities provided me with the most appropriate method of generating data for my personal and professional development.

CHAPTER FIVE.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

A rising tide lifts all boats.

(Tom Shriver as cited in Goleman, 1997, p. 286)

Introduction

Engaging students to participate in a classroom community of character through meaning and purpose requires conscious leadership from all stakeholders - administrators, teachers, parents, and students. As this research project is uniquely concentrated on student social and emotional success within the classroom setting, community character development can also be addressed at a school-wide level. This chapter explores continued routines and recommendations for the classroom, as well as at the school community level under the umbrella of social responsibility. In addition, various recommendations within the educational system are addressed in order to provide educators with consistent knowledge pertaining to the social and emotional development of students. “In a time when too many children lack the capacity to handle their upsets, to listen with focus, to rein in impulse, to feel responsible for their work or care about learning, anything that will buttress these skills will help in their education. Emotional literacy enhances schools’ ability to teach” (Goleman, 1997, p. 284).

Project Recommendations

This project’s research findings and conclusions identify nine specific recommendations in the educational environment. Recommendations for continued character developmental activities in the classroom, as well as for a school-wide

concentration on character are acknowledged. Further recommendations focusing on the systems surrounding A.B. Dixon Elementary School are addressed in order to support and foster the overall well being of students' emotional and social success. These recommendations are addressed firstly within the classroom, then expanding outwards to reach the entire community and educational system

1. Continue to Enhance Character Routines in the Classroom Community

As the research data has pointed to the importance of weaving character development throughout the curriculum, weekly routines in the classroom related to this topic are recommended to enhance the classroom community. As students have already participated in acknowledging each others' positive actions during the class learning circle, I recommend that this routine take place every week in class meetings. The National Association of School Psychologists (2003) concludes that when positive behaviour becomes habitual, it often leads to moral behaviour. Implementations such as creating an "Appreciation Box" for students to recognize their peers' actions throughout the week would also provide an opportunity to continue peer recognition. Acknowledging students through the "Appreciation Box" can become a weekly routine in class meetings. Students can accumulate the acknowledgements, recorded on paper, throughout the year to add to a student portfolio that can be honoured and admired in subsequent years. By receiving the portfolio of peer comments, students are provided with an opportunity to remember their significant actions. The research data also concludes that peer recognition increases student motivation, risk-taking, and self-confidence. By implementing this recommendation in the classroom, students are not only enhancing

their intrinsic motivation in being recognized by their peers, they are also being reminded at the end of the year of their influential actions. This reminder will continue to motivate students intrinsically to make a difference in future social situations. There is a positive emotional link to learning; research indicates that the learning environment influences the shape of the brain, “when we learn, truly amazing changes take place in the neural connections in the brain,” (Wolf, 2001, p. 120). By taking part in weekly class meetings, students become accustomed to a more safe and comforting environment and are more able to take risks. The data conclusions indicate that learning is unsuccessful when one is afraid and unsafe. Moreover, implementing a habitual weekly routine throughout the year is beneficial to student motivation, confidence, and learning.

As the class meetings become a weekly routine, it is also an opportunity to discuss why some students may not have received peer acknowledgment. Research findings have indicated that students felt an intrinsic motivation to continue to identify their peers’ positive behaviour. This discussion may identify what actions are admirable to others while reminding students of the importance of peer acknowledgment. Implementing this class activity in weekly class meetings helps to habituate student character.

2. Acknowledge Social Responsibility as a School Goal

Social responsibility within the school enhances classroom communities, climates, school culture, as well as student academic skills and overall behaviour. The Richmond School District acknowledges social responsibility as a priority and has implemented various programs and services through the counselling department to raise a

consciousness among the schools. As this priority is already addressed within the district, it is equally essential to acknowledge social responsibility as a school goal. Doing so would leverage academic success and invite leadership and participation of the entire school community.

In 2002, school parents requested a committee to include solutions involving social responsibility and positive behaviour within the school. This committee, “The Dragon Power Committee,” presently includes school administrators, three teachers, and three parents. Although two meetings have been held this year, and a school-wide positive behaviour initiative has begun, committee parents continue to feel uncertain of their role and position among the “Dragon Power Committee” and would like to see more structured initiatives throughout the school. Thus, addressing social responsibility as a school focus would enable the “Dragon Power Committee” to implement a character concentration at a school-wide level, thereby promoting school-wide success.

3. Implement Character Concentration at a School-Wide Level

Through the “Dragon Power Committee”

As social responsibility promotes positive behaviour and effective decision making within the school environment, incorporating character to this role would supplement the principles and values of the students’ behaviour. When students concentrate on developing principles such as fairness, integrity, honesty, or service, they learn the actions involved in promoting this behaviour and understand its influence and impact on others. Lickona (2004) promotes character development as “helping kids become good students and good people by being the best school we can be in every

way”(p. 237). He further addresses the essential habits of the mind, heart, and action: “Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good” (Lickona, 1992, p. 51).

Presently, when positive behaviour is exhibited, students at Dixon are acknowledged by receiving a “dragon paw,” which is displayed in the school’s hallway. Without concentrating on the character principles underlying the positive behaviour, the students are not able to connect the importance of their behaviour to their actions. As Stephen Covey (1989) states, “To try to change outward attitudes and behaviours does very little good in the long run if we fail to examine the basic paradigms from which those attitudes and behaviours flow” (p. 28).

Introducing character as a concentration of the “Dragon Power Committee” involves a commitment from the Dragon Power Committee, school administration, teachers, parents, and students. Lickona (2004) identifies parent involvement as the leading indicator of school success: “When schools and parents present a united front concerning character matters- respect for rules and authority, responsibility towards homework, honesty on tests and term papers, and sportsmanship at athletic events- students get a clear and consistent message and are more likely to take it seriously”(p. 60). Including the parents on the Dragon Power Committee enables them to understand the importance of concentrating on the character development of their children’s actions, as well as the roles and expectations within the school.

In order to promote a school-wide character concentration within the Dragon Power Committee, the school must develop a clear policy statement. Focusing on

general outcomes of student behaviour and concentrating on the essence of character development involves a paradigm shift - instead of reacting to student actions such as bullying. A clear policy statement provides a concise description of expectations relating to student behaviour in the school environment.

Recommendations from outside the school are equally important to enact the program at the school-wide level. Discussions with schools that have experienced school-wide culture changes would be beneficial. Inviting guest speakers from the district level, such as the district counselling team, would additionally allow the committee teachers and parents to understand the importance of a congruent school-wide culture and fundamental character strength. Covey (1989) identifies the importance of this school-wide concentration: “Eventually, if there is not deep integrity and fundamental character strength, the challenges of life will cause true motives to surface and human relationship failure will replace short-term success” (p. 22).

4. Provide Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers and Parents

It would be equally beneficial for teachers to be provided with professional development opportunities in order to develop and better understand character among the student population. Additionally, professional development opportunities for teachers and parents would provide both streams of adults with the necessary tools and language to incorporate character development among students at both school and home. As mentioned previously, when students see that both parents and teachers are working together towards the same cause, students are left with a consistent message and are more inclined to take it seriously (Covey, 1989, p. 60).

Understanding the need for the use of character development in the classroom and at a school-wide level is paramount for teachers and staff. If teachers understand that the focus on student character development will increase student responsibility toward their academic work, and respect for school staff, while also increasing peer kindness and reducing peer cruelty, they will recognize the opportune necessity for character concentration school-wide. Once this concentration has been decided from the “Dragon Power Committee,” professional development would be made available for teachers to develop useful strategies to employ on a daily basis.

We must also include the importance of language and dialogue in the school environment as a topic for professional development. As the research data identified the importance of using a language that focuses on the task and the success within the task, it is imperative to consider the influence of student behaviour from an adult’s choice of language. Rosenberg (2005) identifies the importance of an adult’s choice of language by using a “power with” approach in dialogue over a “power over” approach (p. 25). As a “power over” approach is often heard as demands, resulting in defensiveness and refusal, a “power with” approach permits adult needs to be heard as requests, which are more likely to be heard and accepted (p. 25). If all teachers could understand the importance of effective language and its correlation to positive behaviour, while using the same cohesive language school-wide, teachers and administrators would find a decline in distractions that take place through negative behaviour in class and school.

Because the use of language by adults when interacting with students is paramount, parents should have the opportunity to take part in professional development

with teachers. As teachers are learning effective tools that help solidify the foundation of the school-culture, equal parent involvement is beneficial. When students realize that parents and teachers are working together, they are more inclined to respond seriously (Lickona, 2004, p. 60). With the familiarity and consistent use of language, students can recognize the impact of their own positive behaviour. As students feel increasingly supported and encouraged by adults in their learning environment, they would display more courage and be open to take more risks - enhancing all learning.

As teachers orchestrate opportunities to enhance the character development of their students, it is essential that teachers display their humanistic character to their students. When students recognize that their teachers are motivated to be at school, the students are motivated to be there as well. The research data indicated the importance of the efforts teachers make to get to know their students individually. Kessler (2002) further identifies that it is equally important that students see their teachers as a “whole person” and not just as an instructor (p. 23). “What we *are* communicates far more eloquently than anything we *say* or *do*” (Covey, 1989, p. 22).

5. Provide a Supportive Community for Teachers and Staff in the School Environment

When developing a school-culture for students and their social, emotional and academic success, it is just as important to focus and identify teacher recognition and development. A positive school climate will disintegrate with an absence of staff appreciation and recognition. Lickona (2004) suggests that “strengthening a staff’s sense of community can be as simple as making sure people feel appreciated” (p. 244). Student school morale is linked to staff morale. An act as simple as creating “appreciation notes”

can encourage administration, teachers, counsellors, and custodians to express their gratitude with their colleagues. Placing a manila envelope in the staff room and providing notes for staff to express their appreciation for others provides an opportunity for staff to have their attitudes and efforts recognized by their colleagues. The data concludes that verbal recognition is the most effective form of intrinsic motivation. Appreciation notes can be displayed in the staff room or shared at the beginning of each staff meeting. Recent studies on staff morale in educational environments indicate that by implementing such an activity is beneficial for the school culture. “Morale in the building soared. Faculty noted that this [was] the most important thing we have done in ten years” (Lickona, 2004, p. 245).

6. Enhance Character Communication Between Home and School

Providing a means of communicating the school-wide character development activities between school and home is imperative for parental participation and cultural growth. The Dragon Paw Committee is beginning to understand its role within the school community; nevertheless, it has already begun to implement a positive student behaviour system in the school. Throughout each month, an adjective from the acronym D-R-A-G-O-N (the school symbol) is used as a means to concentrate on student behaviour. For example, during the month of January, students and staff are encouraged to recognize actions and behaviour associated with the letter “D,” which represents “Determined to make a difference” or “Déterminée à faire une difference.” When students demonstrate a positive behaviour, their name is placed on a dragon paw symbol, which is displayed in the school halls. In order to ensure this activity is successful, a

greater emphasis on the process of these actions must be acknowledged and communicated to students, staff, parents, and the community.

When implementing such an activity, communication is essential. As indicated through a Dragon Power Committee memo, parents feel that social responsibility outcomes are not recognized or measured as part of the Social Responsibility Committee. This situation provides an opportunity to enhance communication and parent roles through school councils and parent groups. The role of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is to advance the public school education and well being of children through activities and promotions by enhancing meaningful parent participation (British Columbia Federation of Parent Advisory Councils, 2005). The use of the Parent Advisory Council to provide information from the committee to the community is fundamental for parent involvement and cohesiveness.

As administration and staff understand that parent involvement is the leading indicator of school success, sharing information and updates regarding social responsibility strategies from the Dragon Power Committee is imperative. Sharing information on resources and tools relating to determined character behaviour at home would help provide opportunities for parents to expand the school-wide concentration to the home environment. PAC newsletters outlining strategies discussed and available literature would be distributed to parents and families who were unavailable to attend the PAC meeting.

Providing workshops to parents is another initiative that could enhance character communication between home and school. Lickona (1992) suggests that when children

do not have a close relationship with their parents, they are more vulnerable to peer pressure (p. 33). Workshops can provide parents with the necessary tools that would assist them in parenting and developing those close relationships. Goleman (1997) has indicated in recent studies that “having emotionally intelligent parents is itself an enormous benefit to the child” (p. 190). The research data also indicated that adults have an influential role in modelling behaviour to their children. In order to create respectful children, it is imperative that adults model respect. If parents have the opportunity to understand the significant influence of their own actions and choices, their child’s behaviour would be more consistent at home and at school. “To optimally educate children to be responsible young adults, we need to understand more fully what it takes to be a responsible adult” (Berkowitz, 1998). Providing opportunities where parents could learn how to positively influence their children’s character development would enhance the cohesiveness of school-wide and home initiatives.

7. Recognize Positive Student Behaviour School-Wide

Communicating positive student behaviour at a school-wide level is essential to continue to motivate intrinsic student behaviour. As the research data indicates, being recognized by peers increases student self-confidence and motivation to learn. Martin Buber (1985) recognizes the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. “When we confirm someone we spot a better self and encourage its development” (Noddings, 1992, p. 25). Identifying the students who have received a “dragon paw” at a school assembly, by asking them to stand amongst their class peers, not only identifies positive behaviour, but also it motivates the other students to participate in the behaviour in order

to be recognized at the next assembly. Additionally, having students self-identify at an assembly rather than being identified reduces the risk of being embarrassed or shy.

Character concentration on the appropriate monthly acrostic letter (D-R-A-G-O-N) would also be acknowledged at the assembly, identifying a further discussion that teachers and students could take back into the classroom. Inviting change into the monthly routine is imperative for school-wide success and cultural change. Introducing a change in school culture promotes more participation from teachers, students, and parents. More participation brings forth intrinsic behaviour.

8. Create Character Through Mentoring Opportunities with New Teachers

The Richmond School District provides funding for mentoring opportunities to new teachers during their first two years of teaching. Such a mentoring program within the district is a privilege, given that most districts do not have such programming. Sharing character development ideas with beginning teachers is an opportunity to explore the meaning and purpose of student life in the classroom. Communicating these ideas would not only solidify classroom management skills, but also it would enhance the essence of teaching by using strategies and language needed to enrich student social and emotional success.

Cooperatively planning class routines and units with two or more teachers may be the initial action when promoting student character development. When more teachers have been exposed to character ideas and class routines, the student culture of the school will shift quickly. Students, parents, and teachers will note, “This is how things are done here.”

9. Communicate the Need for Character Recognition in

University Education Programs

Communicating the desire for character development within teacher training programs would provide in-service teachers with the necessary background to foster a classroom community with meaning and purpose. As students are more capable of learning when they are happy in their learning environment, more concentration on the fundamental truths of happiness is needed in university education programs. In order to facilitate this, school boards and education program faculty advisors need to communicate what is expected of teacher training graduates. Lantieri (2001) acknowledge the importance of recognizing happiness in the classroom: “What role can our schools play in shifting our strategies to welcome a more intentional development of the emotional, social, and spiritual domains of our students’ lives?” (p. 12). Providing this background to students at the university level will not only supply them with essential tools and ideas as they move into the classroom, but it will clarify the essence of teaching. For many university educational students, it may be a reminder of why they chose to pursue a vocation as a teacher.

Organizational Implications

Several effective processes are required in order to implement the outlined recommendations. As the recommendations are addressed among many levels of the education system, applying the recommendation at the classroom level is recommended as a starting point. Focusing at the nucleus of the system and addressing one goal at a time creates change in all directions. The outlined recommendations of this research

project must be addressed at a classroom, school-wide, and community level and require the participation and leadership from administration, teachers, students, and parents.

Sharing Initiatives with Staff

To create an atmosphere where students are happy and want to learn requires a commitment to student relationships, connections, and the classroom community. Understanding this is the beginning, “being” a part of this is indispensable. Sharing these ideas with the school staff in the form of a discussion at a staff meeting or a professional development day would help disseminate this information while creating opportunities for more students to succeed. If a simple way of being enhances student success, creates a positive school climate, and reduces behavioural issues, it is worth sharing and developing the growth. When students and staff display gratification and optimism in their working and learning environments, additional learning goals can be addressed with simplicity and desire. “A rising tide lifts all boats” (Shrivers as cited in Goleman, 1997, p. 285).

Creating a Vision

Addressing social responsibility as a school-wide initiative creates an opportunity to enhance and develop meaningful strategies within the “Dragon Power Committee.” Addressing this as a school goal provides a vision; without a vision there is little growth. The benefits of having a goal and a vision provide lasting results; it supplies a solid commitment and foundation of great substance.

Adjusting School Hours

Addressing character concentration at a school-wide level creates opportunities to enhance student relationships and connections. Such a calling requires more structured, supervised time at school. Opening the school doors at 8:30 am to commence a school start at 8:40am allows the teachers to be at their classroom door ready to address the arrival of the students in the morning. A commitment to this action for one month can produce lasting results in a school culture. Being present for the students as they arrive at school enables a distinct connection at the beginning of the day - nurturing the presence of the students. Such an act allows the students to begin the day acknowledged.

The current school hours allow the students to arrive at 8:30 am to begin class at 9:00. This structure not only allows 30 minutes of unstructured, unsupervised time for the students, it also does not allow teachers to form a solid connection with the students as they enter the classroom. Teachers may be in their classroom at the time of student arrival; however, it is inappropriate to demand that teachers address their students as they individually arrive throughout a 30-minute period. Without correction of the morning school hours, such a student connection and improvement to school culture remains unavailable.

Restructuring Staff Meetings

Additional attention must be applied to restructure staff meetings. As the lack of time is the number one enemy of sustained educational development, time is essential for monitoring a quality character education program (Lickona, 2004, p. 245). By devoting half of the time originally used in staff meetings to staff development and sharing,

character support and development would be addressed. Memos and additional information that would normally be shared could be addressed through the district web server (Richnet) enabling more available time for discussion. A further staff commitment to use Richnet to check e-mail at least twice a week would be necessary, and must be modelled by administration. Technology, used appropriately, is a rich tool for corresponding essential information. In today's learning environment, all staff and administration should be familiar with the use of this tool.

Restructuring School Assemblies

Acknowledging positive student behaviour by using the Dragon Paws at a school-wide assembly is an excellent way to advertise school spirit. The community has always been invited to attend the school-wide assemblies; however, parental attendance has declined in the past years. O'Toole (1995) describes how "conformity is the enemy of leadership" (p. 47) and therefore suggests the importance of structural change. In order for the staff, student, and parent community to participate enthusiastically through the "Dragon Power Committee" initiatives, a number of structural changes must take place. Firstly, the Dragon Paw acknowledgements and announcements must be introduced, acknowledged and represented by specific teachers or administration involved in the committee, rather than simply mentioning the information at the assembly. Secondly, an opportunity for student participation and involvement in the intermediate grades would be ideal. Introductions, such as role-play and short scenes, identifying recognizable positive student behaviour would allow younger students to understand what positive behaviour could look like on the playground and in the classroom, as well as to provide a

leadership opportunity for the older students at the assembly. Goleman (1997) describes the importance of cultivating character and emotional literacy in the schools by stating: “it is not enough to lecture children about values: they need to practice them, which happens as children build the essential emotional and social skills. In this sense, emotional literacy goes hand in hand with education for character, for moral development, and for citizenship” (p. 286).

Creating Opportunities for Peer Acknowledgement

Further, weekly reminders to the students and teachers about recognizing student positive behaviour through the daily morning announcements would encourage and remind both students and teachers to participate in this activity. The research data indicated that students receive just as much intrinsic motivation when they acknowledge their peers as when they receive a positive acknowledgement from their peers. Moreover, allowing students to participate in identifying their peer’s positive behaviour would not only increase student participation, it would also enhance student positive behaviour. Additionally, intermediate students identifying positive behaviour with their primary buddy class would increase student participation, motivation, and positive behaviour.

Implementing Satisfaction Surveys

In order to identify the growth and development of the school goal, it is important to identify growth and changes as the program develops. Parent, student, and teacher satisfaction surveys would be distributed each year, at different times, to measure the program development, progress, and on-going challenges. Lickona (2004) explains that

parental feedback will “bring problems to light and provide objective data on how widespread they are” (p. 79). Teacher satisfaction surveys are equally as important as several questions and issues can be addressed: Do teachers feel a change in student behaviour in the classrooms and school-wide? Are teachers feeling supported by these new initiatives? Students, equally, have an important role to play in completing a satisfaction survey. Although their survey may include simple emotional icons, such as various facial expressions, it is extremely important to measure the student’s happiness at school throughout the implementation of the program. This will also indicate what future initiatives must be provided as the program develops, as well as to identify the growth that has taken place. Satisfaction surveys provide an important perspective when measuring the growth and development of new initiatives.

Recording Discipline Referrals

Additionally, the use of a software program to identify student discipline referrals is beneficial to use throughout the school year. Such a program will enable administration and teachers to refer to past experiences in order to understand behaviour patterns and times, as well as effective consequences to the behaviour. This information would also provide recommendations for structural change and growth to enhance student behaviour throughout the school.

Ongoing Professional Development

Simultaneously, conversation between schools concentrating on the same vision and school goal would take place throughout the growth and development of the program. Sharing information provides opportunity for improvement while learning

from one another's experiences. Further professional development would be available to the teachers throughout the implementation of the program in order to enhance classroom routines, perspectives, and school-wide cohesiveness. Senge (1990) asserts that the most important active force is the staff. "If [staff] themselves are not sufficiently motivated to challenge the goals of growth and technological development...there will simply be no growth, and no gain in productivity" (p. 139). Providing opportunities and resources to staff for a successful program implementation is essential.

Future Research

The implications of this project's processes and findings provide sufficient detail for future classroom and school-wide research. Additionally, the results of this project promote recommendations for future projects such as:

1. What can administrators and teachers do to acknowledge a community of character, courage, meaning, and purpose throughout the school?
2. What motivates and influences teachers to teach their classroom curriculum through the use of soul and spirit?
3. How can staff morale influence school culture and school-wide social responsibility?
4. How can the implementation of a sustainable school-wide Character Education Program enhance community participation?
5. What influence do teachers and parents have when working together to promote character development at home and at school?
6. How can teacher mentoring be used to promote and enhance character and courage throughout the curriculum?

7. What influence do university education programs have in preparing teachers to provide a rich curriculum enhancing character and courage development?

Conclusion

The research findings and conclusions from this project identify recommendations for the educational environment. Recommendations under the umbrella of social responsibility provide opportunities for continued character development in the classroom and school community. Additional recommendations pertaining to the education system and its development were also acknowledged as they provide a rich opportunity for positive change within the school environment. The recommendations and suggestions mentioned will not solve and answer every social and learning problem; they will, instead, provide ideas and strategies to use and elevate the overall well being of social and emotional success. “Given the crisis we find ourselves and our children facing, and given the quantum of hope held out by courses in emotional literacy, we must ask ourselves: shouldn’t we be teaching these most essential skills for life to every child—now more than ever? And if not now, when?” (Goleman, 1997, p. 287).

CHAPTER SIX.

LESSONS LEARNED

Introduction

This major research project evoked leadership growth and development on a personal and professional level. Opportunities to enhance leadership skills in the classroom, school, and community enabled me to understand the importance of modelling leadership on a daily basis. This chapter explores the learning that has taken place during the major project as well as identifies the remaining areas of required growth and change.

Ethics

Understanding the importance of ethical research when working with young students was paramount when organizing and conducting the data collection for my research project. As ethical issues can arise in educational settings where participants are minors, it is important to guarantee student anonymity during the research studies (Richmond School District, 1999). Clarifying how I would ensure student anonymity to the Richmond School District and Royal Roads University was essential when describing and planning how I would conduct my research. Although the ethical process seemed overwhelming at first, it was important to take one step at a time. Once I initiated contact with both Richmond School Board and Royal Roads University to verify the essential steps in receiving ethical approval, the process became very straightforward. I found the staff from both organizations to be very helpful and informative. Because I was working with children, ethical approval from Royal Roads University was needed before

submitting the information to the Richmond School Board. To make this possible, I ensured that necessary ethical requirements were submitted in August 2005. I received approval from RRU at the end of August 2005 and was ready to submit the information to RSB during the first week of school in September 2005. The ethics approval was granted in mid-September 2005, allowing me to begin the research collection. As a person who struggles with details, it was important for me to understand the essential steps involved in this process.

Modelling and promoting honesty and integrity with my students and colleagues during the research study was paramount. Ensuring that the appropriate ethical principles were applied to research participants, parents, and administration at various stages of the research conduct was equally imperative. As the majority of the research took place in an elementary classroom, it was important to distinguish the research activities, used uniquely for the data collection, from the grade 4/5 curriculum, requiring assessment and evaluation. Further, it was essential that the students understood the requirements for each.

Looking back now, I realize the importance of receiving ethical approval and the time that is involved in the process. I am fortunate that I was organized at the beginning of the school year and was ready to conduct my class research immediately following the teachers' strike. It was imperative to plan the necessary amount of time involved in the ethical procedures.

Research and Inquiry

Creating a schedule at the beginning of the action research project was important to provide the structure for the step-by-step process of the project research. Balancing a full-time teaching position with academic research has its challenges. Using the schedule as a guide not only structured my time, but also it prepared me for upcoming deadlines.

Deciding to incorporate action research with the grade 4/5-class curriculum was beneficial when using my students as research participants. As flexibility is a necessary ingredient in an elementary school classroom, I was able to structure the two data collections when they were most pertinent to the social studies' lessons. Planning set dates well in advance would have been very difficult as the unexpected teacher's strike interrupted many routines and schedules. Further, incorporating a class focus group and learning circle enabled the students to work cooperatively in small and large groups- one of the several outcomes in the Social Responsibility Performance Standards.

Conducting the face-to-face interview was an inspiring idea I had when selecting the appropriate methodology. Attempting several times to contact the interviewee, I was finally successful. Knowing that the interview added an additional perspective to the data collection, it was an asset to have the flexibility and space to enable the interview to take place. Additionally, developing the interview questions to reflect the scope of the project was important to use as a guide and not as a principle resource. It was essential to accept the direction and pace of the interview as it provided a rich perspective on the research project.

Completing the literature review prior to the data collection helped ensure the scope of my research and affirmed the research direction. I used the time during the provincial teachers' strike in early October to gather the appropriate literature and began organizing ideas and concepts. The literature further helped guide the emerging themes from the data collection and was supported evidence when developing data conclusions.

The data analysis brought forth reflection and conclusions. Having taken some time away from the project after the initial data collection, I found it challenging to immerse myself back into the data in preparation for the analysis. Looking back now, it would have been easier to analyse the data immediately following the data collection. The data analysis process also called for more time and attention than I had originally allotted. This may not have been the case had I been more aware of what the process of the data analysis entailed.

On a positive note, I adjusted my work schedule and took an "Educational Leave of Absence" for one week in January. This allowed me to have the necessary time and space to concentrate entirely on my growth and the progress of the research project.

Communication Skills

Developing both written and verbal communication skills was most important during the process of the research study. As communication was the most essential tool during the learning journey, it was important to be able to communicate effectively with my project supervisor and sponsor, research participants, parents, and staff members. Communicating effectively required precise and descriptive information.

There were several opportunities to develop my writing skills during the project. As most of the communication with my project supervisor took place through electronic mail, I learned value of clear and brief communication. In order to eliminate confusion, I felt that it was important to pose questions whenever necessary. I appreciated the effective and punctual responses from both my supervisor and my project sponsor.

Writing for an academic audience was a learning opportunity. As most of my written communication is addressed to grade 4/5 students and their families, it took some time to adjust to the necessary language needed for an academic audience. Through experience and time, my writing style developed. I hope to create more opportunities in the future to enhance my academic writing skills.

Communication with my students and parents was equally important. As most of the communication with the students was verbal, it was important to verify that everyone understood the procedures and routines involved in both the class focus group and learning circle. Further, because I was working with younger students, it was important that I effectively related the information to the appropriate audience. This information was also communicated in written form to the participants' parents, as it was important to keep everyone informed.

During the face-to-face interview, I had the opportunity to practice effective listening skills. Having the questions prepared ahead of time and allowing space for probing new ideas ensured that the interviewee had an idea of the scope and direction of the interview. Effectively listening to the interviewee enabled me to probe sufficient

information at the correct moment. I continued to remind myself, “What do I have to learn from this situation?” while communicating throughout the interview process.

Additional communication with cohort colleagues was essential throughout the research process. Touching base electronically or face-to-face was important to share ideas, insights, and project growth as this provided me with opportunities for effective listening and helped keep the direction and scope of my project on track.

The growth of the project depended on the clarity and organization of the communication. Throughout the research process, I developed my verbal and written communication and advanced my confidence and communication skills. Understanding the importance of effective verbal, written, and practical communication was important learning through the research project.

Team Building Skills

Encouraging healthy and open social interactions within the classroom has been most effective for my students throughout the research project. Not only have I learned the importance of creating sustainable connections with my students, I now understand the significance of recognizing their contributions and encouraging each student’s individual talents. By focusing on these essential team-building skills in the classroom, I have learned to deal with student conflict in a respectful and timely way.

Developing these skills has further allowed me to participate in school-wide opportunities such as the “Dragon Power Committee” which focuses on social responsibility. By understanding the importance of this committee, I also recognize the value of my own ideas as well as the contributions from each member of the committee.

I am able to see and understand various opinions and ideas from more than one perspective.

Learning and Teaching Skills

Gaining insight about the emotional and social aspects of learning has enriched both my teaching and learning skills. Empowering students to become moral citizens and excellent leaders is emphasized through the trust and relationships built with my students. Focusing primarily on my connection with the students and their interests has empowered and encouraged their desire to learn. Trust and confidence equally play a large roll in student's learning and success and is manifested through student connection.

Creating opportunities for students to take risks in various settings promoted courage in students. Observing and acknowledging the students' growth through trust and confidence enabled students to take more risks, thereby enhancing their ability to learn. The connections I made through classroom teaching have enriched my learning and growth as a teacher. I found that by focusing on the "child as a whole" I have witnessed much more growth and overall student happiness.

The conclusions and recommendations of this project have also developed my learning and teaching skills. By understanding the recommendations from a "mini-system" perspective, I have had the opportunity to work collaboratively with teachers and parents to design and implement strategies to enhance the social responsibility performance at a school-wide level.

Opportunities such as teacher mentorship have contributed to both my personal learning and teaching development. Being a part of a beginning teacher's personal

growth has enabled me to explore, develop, and communicate creative teaching techniques in the classroom. Sharing ideas with new teachers has equally contributed to my personal growth and professional development, as it has required me to be a self-reflective, critical learner and teacher. I find that I enjoy taking part in mentoring the growth of a teacher as much as the growth and development of young students.

Leadership

The personal growth and professional development that I have gained throughout the journey of this project has been most significant. Acting as a “learning leader” has broadened my horizons and allowed me to see many perspectives of leadership at the classroom and school-wide level. By understanding the various degrees of leadership, I see the importance of recognizing and orchestrating opportunities for students at the classroom and school-wide levels. Additionally, I feel I have gained an interest in assisting others (students, teachers, and parents) as they explore and develop their own leadership capacities.

Bringing my leadership interests from the classroom to the school-wide level has been a rewarding opportunity. Knowing that I am able to plant seeds of opportunity and growth for others and myself is inspiring. As part of the Dragon Power Committee, I have been able to learn leadership techniques from others as well as to empower students to make a difference. I value the importance of balanced leadership.

This experience has not only enhanced my leadership perspectives, it has also heightened my professional confidence as an educator. What may once have made me nervous and afraid to try now empowers me to make a difference. My desire to inspire

and encourage is the essence of the leadership. I further see the significance of bringing this into all areas of my life. “Excellence rises from within; it can’t be imposed from without” (Zemke, 1985 as cited in Kouzes & Posner, 1997, p. 30).

Systems Thinking

Applying a systems thinking approach during the research process allowed me to recognize the important relationship among students, parents, and staff. Exploring the significance of each relationship within the mini-system of the school enabled me to understand how my individual efforts contribute to the sustainability of the school. Further, this approach allowed me to define the goal of the research project and concentrate on the most immediate effects in the classroom. “We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. ...it is about critical connections” (Wheatley, 1999, p. 45). Keeping this in mind throughout the duration of the project, especially in times of frustration, was essential as it assisted me in understanding the “whole system.”

The systems thinking approach also allowed me to understand the education system from many levels and perspectives. Introducing the project conclusions to others at a school-wide level enabled me to understand the significance of the project conclusions as well as the importance of each individual effort. It is evident that education does not take place in the four walls of the classroom.

Organizational Change

Positive relationships and connections bring out positive change in organizations. In an organization controlled by authority and tradition, change is often prolonged. I have

often observed minor altercations that destroy the incremental progress and change.

Managing such change and keeping it in control every step of the way may empower the growth and authenticity of the organization. Organizations that are open to change and new ideas enable individuals to approach change positively and honour the occurring growth. Wheatley (1997) reminds us of the importance of allowing and honouring change: “living in a world proficient at change, I hope we can begin to work with these powers rather than seeking control or deny them” (p. 139).

Identifying the project conclusions and recommendations enabled me to visualize the opportune shifts in the organization. Concentrating squarely on the opportunities available in the classroom allow change to expand outward at a school-wide and community level. From an organizational perspective, a single problem of behaviour cannot be understood in isolation (Wheatley, 1997, p. 139). Wheatley (1997) acknowledges, “We need to work with the whole of the system, even as we work with individual parts of isolated problems” (p. 139).

Conclusion

This major research project resulted in leadership growth and development on a personal and professional level. Opportunities that took place on a daily basis in the classroom, school, and community allowed me to understand the importance of modelling integral leadership. Understanding the importance of organizational change and systems thinking further encourage me to appreciate communication skills, team building skills, and renewed learning and teaching skills. I am officially a committed life-long learner.

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APPENDIX A.

LETTER OF INVITATION TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS

September 13, 2005

Dear division 9 students and parents:

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project, *Creating a Classroom Community of Character and Spirit*, is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership and Training (MALT) at Royal Roads University. The objective of my research project is to create "socially responsible students who will be excellent role models and leaders in our classroom, school, and community" and is sponsored by Mr. Rob Inrig, Curriculum Co-ordinator and Counsellor, in the Richmond School District.

My research project will take place through the grade 4/5 Social Studies and Social Responsibility classroom curriculum and is foreseen to last over three months (from September to November, 2005). I intend to use three class lessons in the form of a Focus Group and Learning Circle to collect and analyze the student's ideas, work and growth.

The activities will take place in a safe classroom environment ensuring a comfortable learning atmosphere for each student.

This information will be analyzed and collected for my methodology and data use only. Information will be recorded and transcribed with an audio device. Digital photographs of written data will be taken for back-up saving purposes.

This thesis report will be housed at Royal Roads University and made available to public. This report will further be shared with educators in the Richmond School District. Contacting Dr. Nancy Greer can establish my credentials with Royal Roads University. She can be reached by telephone at....., or by email at.....

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. I will further explain more information regarding this action research report during our "Meet the Teacher Bar B Q" on Thursday, September, 15, 2005. Letters of informed consent will be available at this meeting, sent home with students and made available on our classroom website.

Participation in this data collection is voluntary. I will only use data for my reporting purposes with the informed consent of both you and your child. For any reason, throughout the duration of the research, the students have the right to withdraw from the data collection without prejudice or pre-existing entitlements. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

I look forward to meeting you and speaking with you more about this project next week at the Bar B-Q. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Mlle. K. Leiske

APPENDIX B.

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT ADDRESSED TO STUDENTS

Dear division 9 students:

This is to invite you in the opportunity of participating in an action research study. As you know, I am also a student, working towards my Master's Degree at Royal Roads University, in Victoria, British Columbia. I am interested in learning about the positive attributes of classroom dynamics and how it is beneficial to each student in the classroom.

The intent of this research is to create "socially responsible students who will be excellent role models and leaders in our classroom, school, and community". By starting in our classroom, we have the opportunity to expand our ideas within the school.

Throughout our curriculum this fall, I will be incorporating activities related to our present Social Studies and Social Responsibility curriculum. The entire class will be taking part in these activities in order to collect data for the action research project.

Participation in the data collection of this project is voluntary. I will only collect data from the students from whom I receive informed consent. The data collection will be part of a report, which will be available to the public from the National Library of Canada.

If you choose to take part in the action research project, your voices will be recorded for data collecting purposes. Your names will not appear in the final Thesis Report and by no means will any of this information be held against you for assessment and evaluating reasons.

By signing this informed consent, you are interested in being part of the data collected from our class.

Thank you for your support,

Mlle. Leiske

I _____ am interested in participating in the data collection
of the action research project this fall.

Signature of students

Date

APPENDIX C.

INFORMED CONSENT ADDRESSED TO PARENTS

September 16, 2005

Dear division 9 parents:

As some of you may already know, I am presently working on my Master's Thesis at Royal Roads University in Victoria. My thesis project consists of an action research study in which I plan to use the student's work from the classroom curriculum.

My research questions is as follows:

How can I, as an elementary teacher, empower grade 4/5 students to participate in a classroom community through meaning and purpose?

I am presently at the data collection stage and plan to use lessons related to the Social Studies Curriculum on Citizenship and Government combined with the Social Responsibility Learning Outcomes. Throughout a four-week period this fall, I intend to use three class lessons in the form of a Focus Group and Learning Circle to collect and analyze the student's ideas, work and growth. This information will be analyzed and collected for my methodology and data use only.

The purpose of this research is to find positive methods and ways in which students can maximize their learning outcomes by participating in a positive classroom spirit enhancing character development. By no means is any of the data collected used or held against a student for assessment or report card purposes.

The student's voices will be recorded for my personal data collection. In the report, the student's names will not be mentioned and all data will remain anonymous. The data will not be used for assessment or evaluation purposes. This will not affect the student's grade or standing in the class. The data will be discarded one year after my graduation.

Participation in this data collection is voluntary. I will only use data for my reporting purposes with the informed consent of both you and your child. For any reason, throughout the duration of the research, the students have the right to withdraw from the data collection without prejudice or pre-existing entitlements.

This report will be housed at Royal Roads University and will be made available through the National Library of Canada. This report will also be shared with educators in the Richmond School District.

Contact information regarding university credentials can be made through Dr. Nancy Greer, Faculty Coordinator, School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University, Victoria, B.C. She can be contacted by telephone at....., or by email at

Only students who have permission from their parents are able to participate in the depth of this action research study. If you are interested, please complete the following informed consent and return back to school no later than September 30, 2005.

If you have any further questions or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to address me anytime.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Mlle K. Leiske

I allow my child, _____, to participate in the action research study this fall. I understand that the information gained will remain anonymous and be used enhance the overall learning in the classroom and school curriculum.

Parent's signature

Contact Telephone Number

APPENDIX D.

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWEE

This research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts in Leadership and Training (MALT).

The learner concerned is **Kimberly Leiske**. Ms. Leiske's credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Nancy Greer, Royal Roads University at

.....

This document constitutes an agreement to take part in a research program, the objective of which to increase knowledge on creating classroom communities and its impact on social awareness and responsibility.

The research will consist of a face-to face interview and is foreseen to last between 30-40 minutes. The foreseen questions will refer to the importance of establishing positive learning communities to enhance social and emotional awareness in grade 4/5 students.

Information will be taped and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and will be publicly accessible.

Prospective research participants are not compelled to take part in this research project. If an individual does elect to take part, she or he is free to withdraw at any time with no prejudice. Similarly if employees or other individuals elect not to take part in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

By signing this letter, the individual gives free and informed consent to participating in this project.

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWEE

Disclaimer:

All questions in this interview are addressed with the sole purpose to increase knowledge on the creation of classroom communities and its impact on student's behaviour, social awareness and social responsibility. Interviewees are encouraged to provide information associated to student's behaviour; names of students and schools will be avoided throughout the duration of the interview.

Research Question:

How can I, as an elementary level teacher, empower grade four students, to participate in a community of character through meaning and purpose?

7. Why do you believe it is important to empower your students to be socially aware?
8. How does one identify a socially aware student?
9. What role do teachers play in fostering character development in their students?
10. How important is the environment of the classroom and its role in bringing happiness into student's lives?
11. From your own personal experiences, what are the underlying factors that make children want to come to school to learn?
12. Do you believe the overall happiness in student's lives contribute to their academic learning outcomes? How so?
13. What important ideas and factors from the classroom environment contribute to the character development in students?
14. What to you, is the essence of learning? What is the most important concept that your students walk away from after being taught by you for one year?
15. How important is it for you to establish a caring community within your classroom? When would this initial establishment take place and why?
16. Describe a time when a student's attitude, behavior, self-confidence or learning has taken place in your class. Under what circumstances did these take place?
17. How can the Social Responsibility IRP's be addressed indirectly in the classroom environment? What key attributes are worth considering when trying to address these concepts?
18. What recommendations would you have for a classroom teacher when generating a community in which students are empowered to be their best?

APPENDIX F.

GRADE 4/5 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Quick Scale: Grades 4 to 5 Social Responsibility

This Quick Scale presents summary statements from the four categories in a one-page format for ease of use.

In most cases, these scales can be used to evaluate student development anytime during the year.

In the Elaborated Scale, each of the four categories is printed on a separate page.

Aspect	Not Yet Within Expectations	Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
CONTRIBUTING TO THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often unfriendly, ignoring the feelings and needs of others • shows little commitment to the group or class and has difficulty following basic rules for working together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually friendly; if asked, will help or include others • generally willing and cooperative in classroom and group activities; may need some support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • friendly, considerate, and helpful • contributes and shows commitment to classroom and group activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • friendly and kind, and often seeks opportunities to help or include others • voluntarily takes responsibility in classroom and group activities (effective)
SOLVING PROBLEMS IN PEACEFUL WAYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not take responsibility or listen to another's views in a conflict situation; tends to blame and put down others • has difficulty stating problems or issues, and may be unable to suggest or choose appropriate strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tries to state feelings and manage anger; often needs support to resolve conflicts, frequently overestimating or underestimating the need for adult help • can identify simple problems or issues and generate some strategies; tends to rely on the same strategies for all problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tries to manage anger, listen to others, and apply logical reasons to resolve conflicts; usually knows when to get adult help • can explain simple problems or issues and generate and select simple, logical strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considers others' views and uses some effective strategies for resolving minor conflicts; takes responsibility and shows good judgment about when to get adult help • can explain an increasing variety of problems or issues and generate and evaluate strategies
VALUING DIVERSITY AND DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sometimes disrespectful; appears unaware of others' rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • usually respectful to others, but may need prompting to see how fairness applies to some situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • treats others fairly and respectfully; often shows interest in correcting injustice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fair and respectful; shows growing commitment to fair and just treatment for everyone
EXERCISING DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tends to be apathetic and may feel powerless to affect classroom, school, community, or world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • willing to participate in actions that others initiate to improve the classroom, school, community, or world, but may be unclear on the purpose or impact of these actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows a growing sense of responsibility toward the classroom, school, community, and world; wants to make a difference, but needs help identifying opportunities for action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows a strong sense of responsibility in the classroom and an emerging sense of idealism—wants to make the world a better place; beginning to notice opportunities for action

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APPENDIX G.

UPDATE LETTER TO STUDENTS AND PARENTS

February 7, 2006

Dear division 9 students and parents:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing your son/daughter to participate in the action research, *Participating in a Classroom Community of Character and Purpose*, of my thesis project. The project is sponsored by Mr. Rob Inrig, District Administrator and Counsellor in the Richmond School District and supervised by Mr. Dan Garvey from Royal Roads University.

The research project examined the factors that contribute to a successful implementation of a character-based classroom predicated on purposeful learning and consisted of three data collections with two sets of research participants. The students in division 9 were one set of research participants and took part in two classroom-based data collection activities: the class focus group and the class learning circle.

The first phase of data gathering took place in a large focus group during the afternoon of October 28, 2005. The purpose and intent of the focus group were to allow the students to identify the essentials of a community and to investigate the actions needed for improvement. Students were asked to concentrate on "*the essential characteristics of a classroom community*"; "*what makes our classroom a positive learning community*"; and "*what we need in our classroom to make it one step better than what it is.*" Data was collected and recorded through small group participation and used for interpretation and analysis.

The second part of the data collection took place on November 24, 2005 in the form of a class learning circle. Students took part in a "Peer Citizenship Investigation" and acknowledged their peers for positive actions and behaviour observed throughout the week. Students were further asked to reflect and share their insights on the following three questions: "*How did I feel when a peer acknowledged my qualities and actions in class?*", "*How did I feel when I acknowledged a peer's qualities and actions?*", "*What did I learn from this experience?*". Data was collected in the form of a journal entry and used for interpretation and analysis.

All data was collected and organized into three themes: Fostering relationships and connection, contributing to the classroom community and promoting character development. Six study conclusions derived from the three themes used to empower students to become moral citizens and excellent leaders. The conclusions are as follows:

Conclusion 1: Students desire connections: The need to feel connected is an important social and emotional phenomenon enhancing future student behaviours. When students connect with a specific adult, friend, animal, or nature their social, emotional, and academic success results. By feeling a sense of connection with significant people in their lives, students are less likely to engage in behaviours that jeopardize their future.

Conclusion 2: Students are people first: The relationship between the teacher and his or her students is paramount. Likewise, the importance of the student/teacher relationship is reciprocal: "Students and teachers need each other. Students need competent adults to care; teachers need students to respond to their caring" (Noddings, 1992, p. 69). When students observe the devoted character of their adult teacher, they are more able to demonstrate ethical behaviour and choice.

Conclusion 3: Students require opportunities to contribute to the classroom community: Society today craves a community feeling where people feel cared for and are able to care for

others. Part of a student's identity is finding ways to belong within their community. To feel a sense of belonging in the class, student participation within the classroom community - where their true identity can be seen and heard - is essential.

Conclusion 4: Character development weaves through the curriculum: A character-valued curriculum cannot be taught in isolation. The deliberate, proactive effort to develop good character in children, or to teach children right from wrong, must be integrated through classroom curriculum and everyday routines (Lickona, 1993).

Conclusion 5: Peer recognition increases student motivation, risk-taking and self-confidence: The research data demonstrated that recognition by peers increases student self-confidence and motivation to learn. Students receive just as much intrinsic motivation when they acknowledge their peers as when they receive a positive acknowledgement from their peers. Peer recognition is a symbol of safety. When recognizing or being recognized, students are creating a safer environment –open to vulnerability.

Conclusion 6: Adult choices are influential: Adults, have an influential role in modelling student success. The collected research data suggests that such a significant role enables adults to teach by modelling what they would like to see in their students. Barbara Luther (2002) reminds us that “if we want students to be respectful, we have to model respect. We cannot teach where we do not go” (as cited in Lickona, 2004, p. 111). Moreover, learning requires the courage to take risks, to move forward, and to learn from mistakes. Feeling safe in the class environment enables one to take risks and enhance learning.

The thesis project is under final stages. I would like to thank you, division 9 students and parents, for your on-going support and enthusiasm. Further, without your participation and support, this project would not have taken place. I would be happy to share more project information with you at your interest.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Leiske